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The poetry of the ordinary:
Terence Davies and the social art
film

MARTIN HUNT

Beginning with *Children* (1976), Terence Davies has written and directed a trilogy of short films – the others being *Madonna and Child* (1980) and *Death and Transfiguration* (1983) – and three features – *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), *The Long Day Closes* (1992), *The Neon Bible* (1995). With the exception of *The Neon Bible*, which is adapted from the novel by John Kennedy Toole, all these films are intensely personal, biographical dramas of working-class life in Liverpool during the 1940s and 1950s, drawing heavily upon Davies's own childhood and that of his family. Clearly this background, together with Davies's distinctive formalism, lends itself to a reading of the films as essentially personal and idiosyncratic The argument I wish to pursue here, however, addresses a broader set of issues The starting point for the development of this argument is Christopher Williams's 1996 essay 'The social art cinema· a moment in the history of British film and television culture' [1] In that essay Williams makes two major contributions to the critical debate surrounding British cinema. First, he questions the orthodox critical conflation of 'social realism', thereby restoring the possibility of autonomous consideration of the traditions of realism and the social within British filmmaking Secondly, drawing upon Bordwell's analysis of the European art film as a distinct mode of film practice,[2] Williams argues for the emergence of the social art film as a new, and specifically British, cinematic form which represents 'a blending of the British social-diffuse with some of the concerns of the

1 Christopher Williams The social art cinema a moment in the history of British film and television culture in Christopher Williams (ed) *Cinema the Beginnings and the Future* (London University of Westminster Press 1996) pp 190–200

2 David Bordwell The art cinema as a mode of film practice *Film Criticism* vol 4 no 1 (1979) pp 56–64 See also Steve Neale Art cinema as institution *Screen* vol 22 no 1 (1981) pp 11–39

3 Williams The social art cinema
p 200

4 Linda Hutcheon A Poetics of
Postmodernism History Theory
Fiction (London Routledge
1988)

European art film [3] While Williams concentrates upon *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), *Wish You Were Here* (David Leland, 1987), and *Letter to Brezhnev* (Chris Bernard, 1985) to support and illustrate his argument, and deals only hesitantly with its postmodern context, I hope to demonstrate that Davies's domestic work is central to this new mode of British film practice in both its thematic and formal concerns This will involve consideration of the films as postmodern texts, with particular reference to Linda Hutcheon's notion of historiographic metafiction,[4] in order to propose that it is Davies's postmodern aesthetic that enables the films to operate successfully within both a British and European tradition, and to address the past in a way which is implicitly interrogative without being either overtly tendentious or uncritically nostalgic To approach these films from this broader perspective, therefore, raises three principal areas of enquiry how, if at all, do the films relate to the traditions of realism and the social within British cinema?; to what extent do they incorporate and reflect elements of the European art film?; how are these various elements both integrated within and altered by an overtly postmodern aesthetic?

Roll out the barrel – Terence Davies and social realism

A concern with the social is generally accepted, as Williams notes, to be 'the most significant . . . reputation of British cinema' [5] However, Williams goes on to observe that this concern is neither uniform nor monolithic:

5 Williams The social art cinema
p 191

> The main British tradition is social But to mark the fact that film-makers do not feel compelled to say things that are sociologically accurate, historically stimulating or politically correct, and that they work in a variety of mixed forms to represent and use these perceptions, it may be useful to re-define this social as being social-diffuse in structure and expression [6]

6 Ibid p 193

Seen in this context, I would argue that the Liverpool-set films of Terence Davies have a clear and strong relationship to this tradition of the 'social-diffuse' within British cinema. Indeed, as Geoff Brown observes in his review of *The Long Day Closes*: 'You have to turn back to Humphrey Jennings's wartime documentaries to find images, music and *social context* juxtaposed with such flair' [7]

While this is evident most clearly in the two Liverpool features, Davies's concern with the social, and with the rituals of ordinary life, is present from *Children* onwards. With their diversity of characters, employment of social spaces (including the family home), and presentation of familiar rituals – births, deaths and marriages, Christmas, changing schools and the visit of the 'nit nurse', checking the football pools and racing results, listening to *Two-Way Family*

7 Geoff Brown Review of The Long
Day Closes The Times 21 May
1992 (emphasis mine)

Favourites, Beyond Our Ken and *The Billy Cotton Band Show* on the radio, the weekly call of the insurance man, and, of course, visits to the cinema – all these films can be said to fall within the broad mainstream of a British national cinema.

Nevertheless, there are important differences to earlier filmic representations of the national community – differences which, I believe, account for the difficulty in fixing a critical location for the work, and which can only he resolved if one is to accept Williams's separation of realism and the social and his notion of the social diffuse Most significantly, the focus of the narrative is narrower, a community not of a city, town or village, but rather one located within a single street and orbiting around one particular family The fact that Davies chooses to work at this 'micro' level is an important factor, as I intend to explore later, in the relationship of the films to a realist tradition, to the concerns of the European art film, and to their success as postmodern filmmaking This narrowing of focus, however, should not be taken as any lessening of a commitment to the social. Davies stated, in a 1992 interview for *The South Bank Show*, that.

> You can say important things by concentrating on the small
> That's what Chekhov did. Again, I wouldn't dream of comparing
> myself to Chekhov, but that's what he did. And I think you can
> do that for ordinary people, because I do passionately believe in
> the poetry of the ordinary .. The fact [is] that the majority of us
> don't see car chases every day, or mass murderers, or people
> being blown to bits in slow motion. We don't, our lives are much
> more ordinary than that. But what's important to us, if we're from
> an ordinary family, is that someone gets married, or has a kid, or
> dies They're big things Someone moves house, it's important –
> and I find that immensely moving, because it's small, but we can
> all share that We all know what it's like to feel joy at someone
> getting married or having a child We can all feel the pain of
> people dying [8]

8 *The South Bank Show* (LWT 5 April 1992)

I would argue that it is a mark of Davies's success in this micro-strategy to create something 'we can all share', that, in the reviews of *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, an Australian reviewer can observe:

> Time and again the spectator encounters finely chiselled, evocative
> images and sounds that form a moving, stylized film of subtle
> gestures, rhythms and movements in tandem with vivid emotions
> that speak of universal significance [9]

9 John Conomos Review of *Distant Voices Still Lives Cinema Papers* no 73 (May 1989) p 62

while Jeff Sawtell in the *Morning Star* can proclaim

> It is such a rare treat to see a film that so closely resembles
> aspects of your own life that I sat transfixed by this film's sheer

10 Jeff Sawtell Review of *Distant Voices Still Lives* Morning Star 14 October 1988

11 John Wrathall Picture this *City Limits* no 367 13 October 1988 p 17

12 Armond White Remembrance of songs past *Film Comment* (May/June 1993) p 12

13 Brian Baxter Location report *Distant Voices Still Lives* Films and Filming no 400 (January 1988), p 14

14 Paul Duane, Review of *The Long Day Closes* Film Ireland no 30 (July/August 1992) p 26

15 Tony Williams Terence Davies an interview *CineAction!* (Summer/Fall 1990) p 65

16 Derek Malcolm Review of *The Long Day Closes* The Guardian 13 October 1988

17 Williams The social art cinema p 190 See also Christopher Williams After the classic the classical and ideology the differences of realism *Screen* vol 35 no 3 (1994) pp 275–92

18 Lukács *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London Merlin Press 1963)

beauty and its evident sympathy and understanding of post-war Britain's working-class culture.[10]

Turning to the question of realism, it is this that seems to have caused most confusion in identifying a critical location for Terence Davies within British cinema. Some commentators, recognizing the social element within the films, are nevertheless unable to place them within a British mainstream because of a perceived anti-realism, or because of their personal nature, or their distinctive formalism, or, indeed, any combination of these. Accordingly, the films have been variously described as 'the first realist musical,[11] as elevating 'the musical from a subgenre of fantasy into poetic realism',[12] as combining 'realism with true poetry',[13] as exhibiting a 'gritty surrealism',[14] and as an 'anti-realist critique of major filmic representations'[15] One attempt to convey this complex interplay of elements and influences was made by Derek Malcolm, inviting his readers to consider 'a musical version of *Coronation Street* directed by Robert Bresson, with additional dialogue by Sigmund Freud and Tommy Handley'.[16] This difficulty is partially resolved, as I have suggested above, by moving away from the orthodox conflation of social realism and acknowledging that these are autonomous, if sometimes combined, traditions within British filmmaking. This enables Davies to be viewed as operating within a social tradition without requiring this to be accompanied by a particular realist form.

Nevertheless, difficulties remain Realism is itself something of a moveable feast, and, as Williams notes· 'Many British films from different periods have engaged substantially with some of the conventions of artistic realism', embracing 'modes and concepts which had substantial operational differences'.[17] Perhaps most consistently, mainstream British cinema has sought to present the audience with a representation of the individual within the social, with characters who possess an element of individuation but who nevertheless remain representative without becoming stereotypical This accords with one of the principle tenets of Lukácsian realism Reality, Lukács argued, is so complex and diverse that its essence can only be communicated through an art based upon condensation and the use of typical characters, but which also maintained a unity with the world it is seeking to represent. Lukács further argued that art should exhibit an element of partisanship or tendentiousness.[18]

The realism of Davies's films – if indeed it is a realism – does not do this While the films are, in part, concerned with issues such as homosexuality, religion and the politics of the family, their ambiguous, unresolved and socially-diffuse character denies the establishment of any clear tendentious stance. If they are radical, then they are quietly so. Davies himself has been overtly critical of previous attempts to represent the reality of working-class Britain·

The working classes of that time have always been used as comic turns, on the stage or in films like *Brief Encounter*. Noel Coward couldn't tell the difference between compassion and condescension. It's the same in *This Happy Breed* – chirpy cockneys, you know, chirpy cockney voice. 'We've survived the War!'. It's about as relevant and as real as the Man in the Moon;[19]

19 Terence Davies quoted in Harlan Kennedy 'Familiar haunts Film Comment vol 24 no 5 (1988) p 17

and of the 'kitchen sink' realists:

the product of someone from the middle class slumming it. . There's never been any film which has really done it . . . So it's seeing little bits of little films that you think, 'Yes, that little scene captured just something, an echo of what it was like'. But I can't think of any film that really captured what it felt like to be working class because working-class people didn't make movies.[20]

20 Terence Davies quoted in Williams 'Terence Davies an interview' p 66

21 Kennedy 'Familiar haunts

So, if Davies has a realist project, and his own stated aim has been to 'show life the way it was back then',[21] then it is clearly of a different order from that of previous British realisms. He has spoken of 'finding the dramatic truth, not the literal truth, but a reworking at an aesthetic distance'.[22] Christopher Hobbs, production designer on *The Long Day Closes*, has spoken of a 'memory realism',[23] while Thomas Elsaesser has commented upon:

22 Terence Davies quoted in Gerald Pratley Memories of childhood Terence Davies The Long Day Closes', Take 1, vol 1 no 1 (1992), p 14

23 Christopher Hobbs quoted in Pat Kirkham and Mike O Shaughnessy, Designing desire', Sight and Sound vol 2 no 1 (May 1992) p 13

24 Thomas Elsaesser Games of love and death or an Englishman s guide to the galaxy Monthly Film Bulletin vol 55 no 657 (October 1988) p 291

A heightened, emblematic or dream-like realism . . . for which the implements, objects, customs, the visual (and often musical) remnants of a bygone popular culture have become the icons of subjectivity.[24]

The relationship of this emotional or memory-realism to Davies's engagement with postmodernism is an issue to which I will return later. At this point, however, I wish to argue that this personal realism parallels the 'micro-social' nature of the films. As Raymond Durgnat suggests:

Davies's style is so closely geared to one individual child, in a largely unique situation (local-and-family micro-culture), as to constitute a sort of 'micro-realism', akin to the micro-history now subverting Marxist stereotypes of class and culture and their 'abolition of the subject'.[25]

25 Raymond Durgnat Review of The Long Day Closes Sight and Sound vol 2 no 2 (June 1992) p 44

Thus, while clearly aiming at a personal authenticity, the films do not aspire to the representativeness or tendentiousness of earlier realist forms Nor are they concerned with establishing a general social contextualization. As Philip French observed in respect of *The Long Day Closes*, the film is concerned with 'poetry, not sociology'.[26] This appears to be the root of John Caughie's objection to the concern of *The Long Day Closes* with 'the fantasy of memory rather than . the reality of experience',[27] and that:

26 Philip French Review of The Long Day Closes The Observer 24 May 1992

27 John Caughie Halfway to paradise Sight and Sound vol 2 no 1 (May 1992) p 12

The *Long Day Closes* is set in 1955–56 There seems to be no historical reason for this History, in the shape of Suez or Hungary or the break-up of the left, is almost totally absent [28]

28 Ibid p 13

On one level, it seems odd, as Geoff Andrew points out, to berate the film for failing to be something it evidently did not aspire to be

> as a lonely, introspective eleven-year-old, Davies was probably barely aware of Suez or Hungary or the break-up of the left Moreover, even if he had been as politically precocious as Mr Caughie seems to have been, these matters are quite simply not the subject of Davies' film [29]

29 Geoff Andrew Letter to *Sight and Sound* vol 2 no 3 (July 1992) p 63

On another level, any distinction between the 'fantasy' of memory and the 'reality' of experience is at least questionable in the context of a postmodern film seeking to address the past, as I will consider in more detail below Nevertheless, I would argue that it is clear from the above discussion that Davies is, in the Liverpool-set films, working within a broad social tradition within British cinema, though he significantly shifts the focus of the narrative and diegesis to a micro-social and micro-realist level, which allows him to achieve 'complete particularity of place, time and character, combined with universality of emotion' [30]

30 Nigel Andrew Review of *Distant Voices Still Lives Financial Times* 14 October 1988

Who's a fruit, then? A personal journey

Moving, in Derek Malcolm's terms, from *Coronation Street* and Tommy Handley to Bresson and Freud, I now wish to address the relationship of Davies's work to the European art film. As Williams observes.

> Films like *Distant Voices, Still Lives* . address the principal concerns of the European art film – loneliness, who am I?, social and moral confusions, the importance of the stylish exterior, in ways which are both direct and hitherto unknown in British film-making, but they also begin to shift these concerns toward the group, the context and the social-diffuse.[31]

31 Williams The social art cinema p 199

This, in a sense, approaches the films from the opposite end of the personal–social spectrum to the earlier discussion of their relationship to the British traditions of realism and the social. Just as Davies's micro-social and micro-realist approach represents a narrowing of the traditional British focus on the social, so it also represents a broadening and domestication of the European art film's emphasis on the personal Thus Davies presents us with characters who exhibit elements of alienation typical of the European art film, but who nevertheless remain deeply imbricated in a social setting, albeit one of a newly-problematized nature

Even a passing familiarity with Davies's work would show that it conforms to many of the conventions or expectations of the European art film. the explicit referencing of sexual and religious themes in the Trilogy; the more oblique referencing of Bud's sexuality in *The Long Day Closes* (his observation of the labourer, his tentative washing of his elder brother's back, the sequence at the swimming baths), the lack of narrative resolution in both *Distant Voices, Still Lives* and *The Long Day Closes*, the distinctive mise-en-scene, with its use of tableaux vivants, slow tracking and panning, and long dissolves [32]

One of the most remarkable examples of this occurs in *Distant Voices, Still Lives·* an exterior shot of the cinema; it is raining and umbrellas fill the bottom of the frame; the camera cranes up past posters and two electric lamps as the theme tune to 'Love is a Many-Splendored Thing' is heard on the soundtrack; dissolve to interior of the cinema, crane shot over the audience until Maisie and Eileen are framed in a medium closeup two-shot, weeping at the film, cut to overhead shot of a glass roof, Tony (Maisie's and Eileen's brother) and George (Maisie's husband) fall in slow-motion and crash through the glass, cut to Maisie running through the rain to the hospital; cut to Maisie at George's bedside; camera pans up and around to the hospital window, holds on window, and pans back (without a dissolve) to the bed which now contains Tony, with Tony's mother, Eileen, Dave (Eileen's husband) and Rose (Tony's fiance) at the bedside. This, it must be noted, is not style for the sake of style. Rather, as Davies himself has stated.

> Content dictates form, never the other way around And as *Distant Voices, Still Lives* was about memory I realized that the form of the films should be cyclical not linear . The film constantly turns back on itself like the ripples in a pool when a stone is thrown into it The ripples are the memory.[33]

More generally, Davies's work rejects constantly the 'cause-effect logic' of the classical narrative· 'I've never been interested in what-happened-next I'm interested in what-happened-*emotionally*-next '[34] Davies's engagement with the conventions of the European art film is thus a *purposeful* one, and one which is clearly related to his micro-social and micro-realist project.

Regarding the relationship of the art film to realism, Bordwell observes that·

> the art cinema's realism ... encompasses a spectrum of possibilities. The options range from a documentary factuality to intense psychological subjectivity .. (when the two impulses meet in the same film, the familiar 'illusion/reality' dichotomy of the art cinema results) [35]

32 A case can also be made for Davies working within the type of institutional framework that Neale considers to be a pre requisite of art film production See Neale Art cinema as institution

33 Terence Davies A Modest Pageant Children, Madonna and Child Death and Transfiguration Distant Voices Still Lives The Long Day Closes – Six Screenplays with an Introduction (London Faber and Faber 1992) p xi
34 Terence Davies quoted in an interview with David Cavanagh Empire no 77 (November 1995) p 61

35 Bordwell The art cinema as a mode of film practice p 58

Such a dichotomy is frequently displayed in Davies's work It is, for example, foregrounded explicitly in the 'Christmas table' sequence in *The Long Day Closes*: Bud is sitting on the stairs; point-of-view shot of the rest of the family sitting round the parlour table, discussing Christmas and sorting decorations; cut to shot of Bud; cut to shot of family, now dressed glamorously, as the walls move away to reveal exterior snow scene with carriage lamps and a large, ornately-decorated Christmas tree; family turns to look direct to camera (at Bud/the audience) and wish Bud a happy Christmas.

Thus, the scene shifts between an apparent actuality, which is collective, public and objective, and a remembered past which is individual, private and subjective – from memories of reality to the realities of memory The scene also employs an intertextual referentiality to the families of both American musicals (such as *Meet Me in St Louis*) and melodramas (such as those of Sirk) to create a paradoxical and troubling image which embodies alternative truths of the childhood event being recalled and represented Furthermore, the use of direct address to camera implicates the audience in the construction of the meaning(s) of the scene and its inherent ambiguity. Such a deliberate deployment of ambiguity is, as Bordwell points out, an important element of the art film strategy.[36]

36 Ibid p 60

This use of ambiguity is one of the key elements in Davies's integration of the conventions of the European art film with his micro-social and micro-realist approach and its British cinematic heritage. It is also crucial to his engagement with a postmodern representation of the past.

The music of the years gone by – poetry, postmodernism and the past

John. Where's our Bud, Mam?
Mother. The pictures - where else?[37]

37 From *The Long Day Closes*

The advent of postmodernism in the cinema has, as in so many other areas of cultural and artistic endeavour, attracted much controversy and even hostility. However, a more positive assessment of postmodernism, and one which I believe to be particularly apposite to a consideration of Davies, has been advanced by Linda Hutcheon. She rejects the charge that postmodernism represents the 'end of History':

the postmodern is not ahistorical or dehistoricized, though it does question our (perhaps unacknowledged) assumptions about what constitutes historical knowledge. Neither is it nostalgic or antiquarian in its critical revisiting of history,[38]

38 Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism* p xii

claiming that:

It does not deny the existence of the past; it does question whether we can ever know that past other than through its textualized remains.[39]

39 Ibid p 20

Where the postmodern text seeks to engage with these 'textualized remains' (what Hutcheon terms 'historiographic metafiction'), the result is to:

problematize both the nature of the referent and its relation to the real historical world by its paradoxical combination of meta-fictional self-reflexivity with historical subject matter.[40]

40 Ibid p 19

This is precisely what Davies does, hesitantly in the Trilogy, more boldly and successfully in *Distant Voices, Still Lives* and *The Long Day Closes*, resulting in films which, in Hutcheon's terms, are:

the kind of film I would label as postmodern: parodic, cinematic, questioning. Its constantly contradictory, doubled discourse calls to our attention the issue of the ideological construction – through representation – of subjectivity and of the way we know history, both personal and public.[41]

41 Ibid p 116

To illustrate, the opening sequence of *The Long Day Closes* is as eloquent a proclamation of postmodern historiographic metafiction as there is to be found in Davies's work: close shot; a brick wall at the end of the street; it is pouring with rain; crane down over bricks past a street sign which reads 'Kensington Street, L5'; soundclip from *The Happiest Days of Your Life* ('A tap, Gossage, I said a tap. You're not introducing a film'); crane down past tattered cinema poster advertising *The Robe*; soundclip. the 20th Century Fox fanfare; track back and pan to wide shot of street; slow track down street; soundtrack· Nat King Cole singing 'Stardust'

And now the purple dust of twilight time,
Steals across the meadows of my heart.
High up in the sky, the little stars climb,
Always reminding me that we're apart.
You wander down the lane and far away,
Leaving me a song that will not die.
Love is now the stardust of yesterday,
The music of the years gone by.

The street sign calls to mind the similar opening to Sidney Gilliat's *London Belongs to Me* (1948), with its close shot of the sign for Dulcimer Street, SE11, followed by a slow track down the street. The soundclip from *The Happiest Days of Your Life* (Frank Launder, 1950) also functions meta-cinematically, as does the poster for *The Robe* (Henry Koster, 1953) and the fanfare The soundclip also functions ironically, recalling the Rank gong, and being employed, contra its express sentiments, to introduce a film. This clearly

announces that *The Long Day Closes*, as Harlan Kennedy observed of *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, is.

> a film about memory – but it's also a film about making a film about memory Davies stuffs the movie with deliberately exposed bits of grammar and homage,

and that it is

42 Kennedy Familiar haunts pp 14 15

> postmodernist cinema The visual devices and creative plumbing, far from being tucked away, are on open display. So are the aural devices.[42]

However, the tattered poster, the rain, the slowness of the camera movements, and the poignant ambiguity of the Cole song all signal that this is to be no cosy celebration, but rather that the film's relationship to the past will be ambivalent, interrogative, contradictory, and ultimately unresolved As I have already suggested, Davies, in his domestication and integration of elements of the European art film with those of the British social tradition, presents a view of a past social world that is newly-problematized in precisely the way that Hutcheon's model of postmodern historiographic metafiction demands It is exactly these qualities in Davies's work that allows Armond White to claim that.

> Both *The Long Day Closes* and ... *Distant Voices, Still Lives* ... are rich in sentiment but, being rigorously formal exercises combining the melodrama, the musical, social critique, and avant-garde experiment, they most intelligently should be considered masterworks of the postmodern era.[43]

43 White Remembrance of songs past p 12

Not all responses, however, have been so fulsome. Susannah Radstone, having identified that:

> The dispute between Hutcheon and Jameson rests on two conflicting understandings of, and attitudes to, history Jameson clearly mourns the loss of a Marxist history, with its capacity for transcendence and 'objectivity', while Hutcheon celebrates postmodernism's problematizing of such claims for history,

44 Susannah Radstone Cinema/memory/history *Screen* vol 36 no 1 (1995) p 35
45 Ibid p 39

goes on to question whether *The Long Day Close*s is 'Jamesonian nostalgia work, or Hutcheon's "history"?'[44] Employing a contrast between nostalgia and Benjamin's notion of *Erfahrung*, or 'experience-as-memory',[45] Radstone proposes a reading of *The Long Day Closes* as nostalgic, as history rather than discourse Central to this view is Radstone's analysis of the functioning of the soundclips in the film:

> If the [film proposes] a reading of [its] enounced as discourse, my proposal is that the clips contradict that proposal by tipping the direction of our reading back towards the historic [46]

46 Ibid p 42

From this she concludes that

> It is our recognition of these clips as clips, rather than as discourse – the vehicle for *Erfahrung* – which 'guarantees' these memories as History. ... Quite the reverse, if you like, of a postmodern aesthetic which disturbs History's certainties. Contra Hutcheon, then I am arguing that in .. *The Long Day Closes* postmodern quotation does anything but point up the constructedness of all narratives, be they 'History' or 'story'. Neither do the clips aid in a collective remembering that might run counter to History. In a world in which media images constitute both 'the real' and 'the past', our recognition of these clips legitimates these filmic memories as 'Historic'. A far cry from the conflation of discursive and historic enunciation that Hutcheon, for one, associates with the 'progressive' postmodern text. . A fleeting glance at the [narrative] of . *The Long Day Closes* confirms [its] memories as nostalgia – nostalgia for a lost ideal of phallic masculinity and nostalgia in place of *Erfahrung* or memory as auratic experience.[47]

47 Ibid p 43

I would argue, however, that it is mistaken to view these soundclips in isolation from the other elements of cultural intertextuality in the films, and to see them as somehow existing in opposition to the discursive elements. Rather I would suggest that the cultural references (popular songs, films, radio shows, and so on) are not grafted on to the memory-narrative, but that they are an intrinsic part of it. They are experiences integral to the lives of the characters, and over which they are able to assert a sense of ownership, frequently through corruption for comic effect. This can be seen, for example, in Eileen's, Monica's and Jingles's appropriation of Gershwin's ''Swonderful' as a form of greeting, and their corruption of 'Too Young' ('They tried to sell us Egg Foo Yung') in *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, and also in Curly's comic impersonations of movie stars in *The Long Day Closes*. As White observes· 'For Davies, this process is a natural – integral – part of modern living, proven and justified by these complex family histories', continuing.

> Songs and movies contribute to the feelings that define one's personality, so Davies refers to this pop material reverently, wondrously, and unironically as pure emotional phenomena – even though it also exists as the marker of a particular social period [48]

48 White Remembrance of songs past pp 12 13

These instances of cultural intertextuality are therefore both anchored and anchoring, historicized and historicizing, event and process. They are, generally, not a self-conscious exercise in referentiality or reflexivity Rather they are a part of a lived experience, paradoxically both an internalization and reification of the postmodern condition. They thereby function as a conflation of past event and present

memory, confirming that Davies is indeed engaged in a critical discourse with the past, rather than merely a nostalgic representation of it. The films both confront and question the way we know/construct our past, asserting that the past is part of our present, that it must be addressed in the 'now', and that there can be no going back. As David Wilson observed in respect of *Distant Voices, Still Lives·*

> Davies' strategy   is concerned not so much to represent the past as time remembered, either with affection or with displeasure, as to render it almost present experience [49]

49 David Wilson Review of *Distant Voices Still Lives Sight and Sound* vol 57 no 4 (Autumn 1988) p 282

It is this approach that questions Caughie's distinction between the 'fantasy' of memory and the 'reality' of experience, for, as Hutcheon points out.

> Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, by both questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity.[50]

50 Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism* p 93

Furthermore, far from operating to create the nostalgic distance of historic enunciation, Davies employs these formalist and intertextual techniques to implicate the audience in this discourse, to demand that it confront its own remembered pasts and the contingency of their construction. As Raymond Durgnat points out in respect of T*he Long Day Closes*

> A sprinkling of self-reflexive touches   and the many looks at, or just off-, camera, are not alienation but, on the contrary, complicity effects. Davies' aesthetic is ... expecting consummate identification [51]

51 Durgnat Review of *The Long Day Closes*

This also confronts the audience with the troubling recognition that our relationship to the past is an on-going, and ultimately unresolved and unresolvable discourse. As Harlan Kennedy observes of *Distant Voices, Still Lives.*

> Most films   about childhood lay a patina of adult understanding over the incomprehension of the child's mind. Life couldn't be made sense of then, but thank God it can be made sense of now But Davies' movie isn't like that. It suggests not only that the child can't understand what is happening around him (even the near-grown-up children depicted in the movie), but that the adult looking back cannot understand what happened to him either That indeed there is no understanding. There is only a sense that the family is by turns an inexhaustibly rich microcosm and an

52 Kennedy Familiar haunts p 14

unbearably grim parody of all the ideas and emotions, hopes and quests, by which we live.[52]

Furthermore, Davies could hardly be said to be nostalgic for the casual cruelties of childhood. Some, such as the arbitrary canings, are thankfully no longer with us. Others, such as the routine bullying, are. And it is the casualness, the arbitrary fixing on an aspect of difference or otherness – 'Who's a fruit then, eh?' (alluding to the protagonist's perceived homosexuality in both *Children* and *The Long Day Closes*) – that gives these sequences their painful authenticity. Davies himself, in *The South Bank Show* interview, recalled meeting one of the bullies from his schooldays when filming *Madonna and Child*:

> We had this long conversation, and he didn't recognize me. And I thought, 'You made my life misery ... and you can't even remember'. . . . That was even more depressing, because you think it was done almost to pass the time.

By recalling and representing these childhood incidents, Davies implicates the audience, both bullies and bullied, in an on-going discourse, not simply on bullying or homophobia, but on the human cruelty of intolerance and prejudice in general. Thus, the particular becomes the general, the personal the social, the past the present.

In short, I would argue that Davies's formalism and intertextuality work to heighten rather than to distance the films' emotional affect, and implicate the audience in their discursive project. The tension between a disturbing content and seductive form ensures that the inevitable mythologizing of the textual remains of the past remains vital, problematized and unresolved, rather than inert, nostalgic and closed. As Kennedy notes in respect of *Distant Voices, Still Lives*:

> none of this awareness of style and technique vitiates the film's emotional impact. One reason is that its material is not dead but overpoweringly alive. For Davies, the past is not a foreign country in the sighing, elegiac sense coined in *The Go-Between* – and transmitted to the recent spate of Empire reveries. For Davies, if the past is a foreign country, it's guerrilla territory not a sedate outpost of our existential empire but a Vietnam of the mind There, emotions are not languidly picked over with a calf-gloved hand, they come out of the shadows, raw and ungloved, and pick *you* over [53]

It is this that sets the films apart from the 'heritage movie' and renders them immune to the various criticisms frequently made of that genre.[54]

Returning to some of the earlier concerns of this paper, I now wish to argue that it is this ambiguous and ambivalent relationship to

53 Ibid

54 See for example Andrew Higson Re presenting the national past nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film in Lester Friedman (ed) *British Cinema and Thatcherism Fires Were Started* (London UCL Press 1993) pp 109–29 and Andrew Higson The heritage film and British cinema in Andrew Higson (ed) *Dissolving Views Key Writings on British Cinema* (London and New York Cassell 1996) pp 232–48

the past/present and, by extension, to the personal/social at the heart of postmodern historiographic metafiction that enables Davies to unify and synthesize so successfully the disparate elements of the European art film and the British 'social-diffuse'. As Hutcheon argues·

It is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/the past [55]

55 Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism* p 106

Regarding the art film, Bordwell has stated that:

With the open and arbitrary ending, the art film reasserts that ambiguity is the dominant principle of intelligibility, that we are to watch less for the tale than the telling, that life lacks the neatness of art and this art knows it.[56]

56 Bordwell The art cinema as a mode of film practice p 61

I have already observed how Davies's work can be argued to fit this model. What is important here is that the films also form a bridge between this conception of the concerns of the art film and Hutcheon's conception of the concerns of postmodern historiographic metafiction:

historiographic metafiction enacts a concern, not just for the general notion of subjectivity, but for the specific pragmatics of the conditions of the production and reception of the text itself[57]

57 Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism* p 85

with the result that it challenges those:

cultural and social assumptions that .   condition our notions of both theory and art today· our beliefs in origins and ends, unity and totalization, logic and reason, consciousness and human nature, progress and fate, representation and truth, not to mention the notions of causality and temporal homogeneity, linearity and continuity [58]

58 Ibid p 87

However, it is the postmodern nature of the films that necessitates, emphasizes and problematizes the foregrounding of subjectivity and ambiguity to an even greater degree than the art film.

historiographic metafictions appear to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity· multiple points of view .   or an overtly controlling narrator .   In neither, however, do we find a subject confident in his/her ability to know the past with any certainty This is not a transcending of history, but a problematized inscribing of subjectivity into history.[59]

59 Ibid pp 117–18

As a consequence, while Bordwell can argue that the modernist art cinema allowed a 'fresh coherence of meaning',[60] Davies's postmodern art cinema, inevitably and paradoxically, offers a fresh

60 Bordwell The art cinema as a mode of film practice p 62

coherence of meanings, a paradox in which the audience is implicated through the very act of spectatorship

I argued above that Davies's micro-social and micro-real approach falls within the traditional concerns of British cinema, and that it is this shift of focus to the micro-level that facilitates the synthesis of the social-diffuse with the art film Now I am arguing that it is the postmodern nature of the films that motivates this necessary integrative shift to the micro-social and micro-real level. As Hutcheon points out:

> To elevate 'private experience to public consciousness' in postmodern historiographic metafiction is not really to expand the subjective; it is to render inextricable the public and historical and the private and biographical.[61]

61 Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* p 94

> Historiographic metafiction self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning And, even more basically, we only know of those past events through their discursive inscription, through their traces in the present.[62]

62 Ibid p 97

It is Davies's postmodern context that therefore requires both an engagement with the social on a micro-level and a discursively ambiguous relationship to the 'reality' of the past – a memory-realism rather than a pretended actuality. As Armond White observes in respect of *The Long Day Closes*: 'By re-creating his family's pleasures and days with a profound fidelity to the sentiments that are linked to class, religion, and sexuality, he simultaneously alters the common perception of how a cultural legacy becomes a private one', and this, conversely, enables 'a breakthrough into the great postmodern understanding of the way social and political ideas are contained in and perpetuated by culture'[63]

63 White Remembrance of songs past p 12

Conclusion

Looking back over Davies's Liverpool-set films on the release of *The Long Day Closes*, Geoff Andrew observes that·

> While his films may be rooted in the experiences of both himself and his family, they operate on many levels as confessional accounts of private pains and pleasures, and as evocative documents of British social history (notably working-class life in late '40s/'50s Liverpool); as domestic dramas imbued with a rare honesty and realism, and as poetically styled meditations on matters of spiritual/religious faith; as explorations of the mechanics of memory, and as loving tributes to the power and magic of music and the movies.[64]

64 Geoff Andrew A problem of gratitude *Time Out* no 1134 13 May 1992 p 22

I have attempted here to explain how Davies is able to do this. For all their formalist qualities, his films share the traditional concerns of British cinema for realism and the social. They also embrace many of the concerns and conventions of the European art film, while at the same time broadening and domesticating those concerns so as to facilitate an accommodation with the British social-diffuse. Furthermore, I believe that Davies, from *Children* to *The Long Day Closes,* demonstrates an increasing capacity to integrate these disparate elements and concerns to create films of a remarkable unity and aesthetic coherence. This is a synthesis that is both necessitated and facilitated by Davies's implicit understanding of the nature of the postmodern condition, and which results in films that, as John Wrathall points out, are 'an *authentic,* and *authentically cinematic* evocation of working class life'.[65] In short, Davies's Liverpool-set films, as increasingly mature examples of a postmodern social art cinema, do indeed present us with the poetry of the ordinary

65 Wrathall Picture this p 18 (emphasis mine)

Reverence, rape – and then revenge: popular Hindi cinema's 'woman's film'

JYOTIKA VIRDI

The current academic interest in popular Hindi cinema's dramatic reinscription of women as avenging daredevils, although belated, is welcome. The increasing popularity of these films over the last two decades is accompanied by some turmoil over how to read this move [1] Complaints about static two-dimensional portrayals of women as victims or vamps, madonnas or whores, suffering mothers or pleasing wives, are now replaced by the charge that these women, figured as retaliating rape victims, are merely grist for the Hindi film mill furbished by and for male fantasies. The question is, do the victim–heroines masquerade as avenging women, or do they indeed represent a politics of transformation and agency, dare I say a feminist one? Feminist anxieties around the eroticization of rape might, I argue, shift our focus away from other pernicious aspects of women's representation.

Taking my cue from the literature on film history, or rather films as history, I look back at Hindi cinema's record in dealing with what I designate the 'woman's film' genre. I use the term loosely to signal film narratives centring on a female protagonist If literary and artistic representations are part of public discourse refracting the context within which they are produced, popular Hindi films too, contrary to conventional wisdom, are indexical referents, records of that discourse. One strategy then is to track the trajectory of the woman's film over time, and examine its discourse before the arrival of the avenging heroine to assess discursive shifts, or the genre's transformation

To plot this transformation I discuss three films, *Teesri Manzil/Third Floor* (1965), a thriller (though not strictly a woman's film), *Aradhana/Prayer* (1969), an exemplary maternal melodrama,[2] and *Insaaf ka Taraazu/Scales of Justice* (1980), which inaugurated the avenging heroine subgenre. Shifting representations of women circle metonymically around rape in each of these films. They reflect a discursive history in which revenge ultimately displaces the repression and erasure of rape, or reverence for the female protagonist's suffering I suggest we view the impact of shifting discourses on women's representation, particularly feminist anxieties about their overdetermined and increasing eroticization, in terms of specific transactional changes in stereotypical female figures which complicate the recent history of that representation

Reverence for victims

Shakti Samant's *Aradhana*, faithful to the tradition of the maternal melodrama, is a narrative of excess: a woman's acute suffering, her sacrifices and – a favourite theme in Hindi cinema – her intense love for her son. The film begins with passionate arguments in court, where the female protagonist, Vandana, is on trial. As the credits end, we hear the prosecutor's concluding statement. 'Your Honour', he says,

> in the eyes of the law, there is nothing more grave than the murder of a human being. And when the one who gives birth to human beings, a woman, murders a man, the crime becomes even more heinous I therefore plead with the court that the defendant not be spared because she is a woman. She should be punished severely so that people learn from this precedent and justice is served.

As Vandana, dressed widow-like in austere white clothes, is incarcerated, the camera tilts up to the barred window, and in a protracted flashback the diegesis unfolds

Vandana (Sharmila Tagore) returns from college to live with her widowed father and falls in love with an airforce pilot Arun (Rajesh Khanna), who dies just before they are to marry Vandana discovers she is pregnant, suffers rejection from Arun's family, endures her father's death, and after further misadventures gives up her son to a childless couple, Ram Prasad and Anita. She gains employment as the boy's governess, but her happy years as a surrogate mother end abruptly when Anita's brother visits. He propositions Vandana but is killed accidentally in a scuffle with her and her son, Suraj, who intervenes to help her. To protect Suraj, Vandana assumes full responsibility for the death, and only after twelve years of incarceration is she released from prison. Several coincidences later

Vandana, the suffering woman, in *Aradhana* (1969)

she meets the adult Suraj (also played by Rajesh Khanna) now an airforce pilot. The film is unusually suggestive about how a son displaces a husband in a woman's life by having the same actor play both the lover and the son.[3] A war breaks out and Suraj is wounded in action, but during his convalescence, in the final denouement, he discovers Vandana's identity. To everyone's surprise, in the last scene he introduces Vandana as his mother and declares her the co-recipient of his gallantry award.

In keeping with the demands of evolving genres there is something new in the film, despite the repetition. As a portrait of a suffering woman, it derives from the Indo-Anglian literary tradition developed in the shadow of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Orientalist canons and Victorian norms.[4] Sexual restraint, the control of libidinal energy, is intrinsic to this representation. While popular films absorbed principles of female chastity, *Aradhana* was the first film to broach heterosexual love as having a palpable sexual compulsion; the film explicitly associates romantic love with sexual desire. Yet harking back to chastity principles it also shows the ruinous consequences of extra-institutional sex for women.

There has long been a puzzling taboo on explicit sex scenes in Hindi cinema. Instead Hindi films developed an elaborate set of conventions to represent sexual love, and song-and-dance sequences stand in for sex scenes. The introduction of Eastman colour in the early 1960s led to abandoning the studios in favour of outdoor locations, especially for romantic sequences and their critical incumbent 'song picturization', as it is known in the film industry.[5] Heroines stretch languorously across the landscape as if innocent of

3 In this and the general plotline, the film bears remarkable resemblance to the eroticization of the mother–son relation noted by Mary Ann Doane in *To Each His Own* (1946). Doane reads maternal melodramas' relentless thwarting of the love story in Freudian terms as a 'flaw' in women's constantly 'misdirected desire – her insistence on struggling for the "wrong" object'. Mary Ann Doane, 'The moving image: pathos and the maternal', in Marcia Landy (ed.), *Imitations of Life: a Reader on Film and Television Melodrama* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991), p. 301.

4 Susie Tharu, 'Tracing Savitri's pedigree', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989), pp. 255–56, 260, 265.

5 Successful outdoor shooting in *Junglee/Uncouth* (1960), *Kashmir ki Kali/Flower of Kashmir* (1963), *Sangam/Confluence* (1964) and *Evening in Paris* (1967) established this convention.

the camera's gaze and their own sexualized bodies. *Aradhana's* opening follows this new tradition in depicting the wonders of 'falling in love'. Yet it somewhat daringly disrupts the sexual sublimation by negotiating heterosexual love outside social and familial sanction (that is, marriage) in the course of the couple's courtship. Caught one day in an unexpected downpour, Vandana and Arun take shelter in a motel Vandana changes out of her drenched clothes and swathes herself in a blanket.

As the camera cuts between Arun's gaze, fixed on Vandana, and the object of his gaze, the two circle the fire in the middle of the room, which within the mise-en-scene excessively signifies their passion (and perhaps a mock Hindu wedding). Shot against the silhouette of a couple in the neighbouring room (divided from theirs by an opaque glass door) where the man is serenading his lover, Vandana and Arun, in an unusual moment for Hindi cinema, grapple with the intensity of their sexual desire. At the end of the famous *roop tera mastana* (you are irresistible) number, Vandana steps forward, unbuttons Arun's shirt, and the camera averts its gaze, cutting to the glowing fire. The next shot is of a sunrise. This sequence is memorable for its elegance, skilfully skirting the censor board's and Hindi cinema's own curious prudery on matters of sexual intimacy – incessantly spoken of (or sung about) but never actually 'shown'.

Yet the entire film demonstrates the 'cunning' of the maternal melodramas which operates on two levels – both condemning woman's victimization and punishing her for a reckless moment of sexual passion, the 'sin' for which men go scot-free.[6] Bereft of a man's protection when her lover dies, she distances herself from her son to avoid the ignominy of unwed motherhood, hands over her rights and recognition as a biological mother,[7] and worst of all, becomes easy prey to strange men. Though Vandana wards off an imminent rape, its upshot – the death of her rapist – drives the narrative forward. Through this, and her voluntary incarceration to protect her son, her severance from him is complete Typical of the genre of melodrama there is:

> a constant struggle for gratification and equally constant blockages to its attainment. [The] narratives are driven by one crisis after another, crises involving severed family ties, separation and loss. . . . Seduction, betrayal, abandonment, extortion, murder, suicide, revenge, jealously . . . are . . . the familiar terrain of melodrama. The victims are most often females threatened in their sexuality, their property, their very identity.[8]

Despite the film's powerful rendition, it betrays a disconcertingly conservative strain At the end of the film, instead of the 'cathartic trial scene' that rehabilitates the mother, we get this exaltation by the state as the son shares his success with his mother, or at least

6   Christian Viviani Who is without sin the maternal melodrama in American film 1930–1939' in Landy (ed), *Imitations of Life* p 178

7   Viviani points out that the maternal melodrama, *Madam X*-style repeatedly traces the mother s separation from the child The mother watches the child from afar she cannot risk jeopardizing his fortunes by contamination with her own bad repute Ibid p 171

8   Marcia Landy Introduction in Landy (ed) *Imitations of Life* p 14

9 For a detailed examination of the
mother–son–state relationship
see my 'The cinematic
imagi(n)ation gender class and
community in popular Hindi films
in postcolonial Indian cinema
1950–95 (University of Oregon
thesis 1996) ch 6

10 Viviani 'Who is without sin
p 173

11 Julia Lesage points to an irony in
feminist film and television
literature that until recently
overwhelmingly focuses on the
castration threat rather than the
rape threat (personal
communication with the author)

12 Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver
Introduction in Lynn Higgins
and Brenda Silver (eds) Rape
and Representation (New York
Columbia University Press 1991)
pp 2–3

deflects his glory onto her. In this, it resonates with several other films, from *Mother India* in 1957 to *Deewar/Wall* in 1975. These films share the theme of a suffering mother finally apotheosized by the state.[9] This veneration reinforces suffering as a value in itself, monumentalizing it, rather than resisting patriarchal norms. The suffering woman is held up as a model of womanhood, idealized, honoured and decorated. In a fantastic and wholly fabricated gesture, the films have the son/state recognize the mother's martyrdom, making her suffering 'all worth it'. I see this move as particular to Hindi cinema and distinct from the 1930s Hollywood versions of such narratives, which show women's miraculous rise to power, fame, success and money, returning them on an equal footing to the society that once rejected them. In turn, the 1930s Hollywood films reverse the European maternal melodramas in which the outcast mother sinks into anonymity and oblivion.[10]

Aradhana spawned several films on the same theme in the 1970s, becoming a virtual woman–victim subgenre – *Kati Patang/Falling Kite* (1972), *Amar Prem/Eternal Love* (1973), and *Julie* (1975) are among the most popular. The narratives recuperate all kinds of 'fallen women', deifying them and their suffering, and setting them up as objects of reverence. While representing women as abject but idolized victims (*Aradhana*-style) became the dominant mode for such women's films, a decade later another subgenre replaced them, with the arrival of the avenging heroine.

Rape and the rape threat[11]

I now take a quick detour from Hindi films to representations of rape in a broader cultural milieu, particularly *before* the transformative moment of the second wave of the international women's movement. Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver note that representations of rape in myths and literary texts are at once a structuring device and a gaping elision·

> an obsessive inscription – and an obsessive erasure – of sexual violence against women (and by those placed by society in the position of 'woman'). . . . Over and over   . rape exists as an absence or gap that is both product and source of textual anxiety, contradiction, or censorship [12]

Classics, such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and E.M. Forster's *Passage to India* are cited most frequently as examples. With the arrival of the women's movement in the USA, signifying rape displaces its erasure. As Carol Clover points out, what mainstream Hollywood glossed up to Oscar standards in films like *The Accused* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1988) had already been said a decade earlier in the lowly horror/slasher genre, only 'in flatter, starker terms, and on

13 Carol Clover Men Women and
Chainsaws (Princeton NJ
Princeton University Press 1992)
pp 20 137

14 In her Life after rape narrative
rape and feminism Real and
Imagined Women Gender
Culture and Postcolonialism
(New York Routledge 1993)
pp 64–82 Rajeswari Sunder
Rajan refers to the rape scene in
Hindi films as almost mandatory
(p 82) Gopalan however reads
it as an excuse for violent sex
though ultimately necessitating
the woman s revenge (Gopalan
Avenging women in Indian
cinema p 51) I am suggesting
we examine the variations in
staging rape

15 Other films of its ilk are C I D
(1956) about a police officer
tackling the mafia Jewel Thief
(1967) about an international spy
ring, and Intikaam/The Test
(1968) about an escaped convict

a shoestring' She suggests a temporal lag between high and low
culture's representation of rape, in folkloric terms, 'a motif graduated
into a tale-type' [13]

The silence, elision, the gap to which Higgins and Silver allude,
was as much a mark of popular Hindi cinema's tradition,
notwithstanding its 'obsessive inscription' of rape [14] Before 1980
Hindi cinema too dealt with rape covertly. Teesri Manzil, ostensibly
a murder mystery, exemplifies this simultaneous inscription and
erasure by using rape as a structuring narrative device and then
adeptly repressing it. An entertaining 1960s thriller[15] with a superb
cast, excellent pacing and an enthralling story line, it differs
remarkably from later films like Insaaf ka Taraazu in how it stages
rape, or rather the rape threat, and represses it.

As the opening credits roll, a car pulls up in the darkness of the
night. The camera tracks a woman's footsteps as she runs up several
flights of stairs, jumps from the third floor and dies. When the film
proper begins, Sunita (Asha Parekh) announces her resolve to avenge
her sister Rupa's death and travels to Mussorie, the hill-resort where
her sister, she believes, was murdered the year before. Reconstructing
Rupa's letters as evidence, Sunita is convinced that Rocky, the
rock'n'roll musician at the hotel there, is responsible for her death.
Sunita meets Anil (Shammi Kapoor), enlists his support for her
mission, and the two fall in love. Anil conceals his alias – Rocky
(his band name) – and the fact that he knew Rupa, who was once
his admirer and infatuated fan When Sunita discovers his chicanery
she rejects Anil/Rocky. Meanwhile, several abortive attempts on
Anil's life compel him to get to the bottom of the mystery. Sexual
intrigue among Rocky's admirers and Ruby, a nightclub dancer,
intensifies this mystery. Rocky singlehandedly finds his assailant,
the villainous Kunwar Sahib, and as he uncovers the connection
between the deaths of Rupa, and later Ruby, and the attempts on his
own life, another subplot unfolds. Rupa, accidentally eyewitness to a
murder implicating Kunwar Sahib, was pursued to her death and
Rocky, a suspected eyewitness to that death, becomes the next
target.

The rape threat is an unmistakeable subtext of the film. Sunita's
goal to avenge her sister's death motivates the action in the first half
of the film Convinced that her sister was 'raped', her goal is to find
the perpetrator. The text is, however, equivocal about the exact
circumstances of Rupa's 'rape' and death. This equivocation stems
partly from the fact that the crime is reconstructed through second-
and third-person accounts a year after Rupa's death. Apart from the
prologue which establishes the crime scene – a long shot of a
woman running up stairs, her fatal fall, followed by a cut away to a
man's footsteps fleeing the crime scene – the scenario surrounding
her death is revisited several times in the film Rashomon-style, we
get varying accounts of the event· we are given Sunita's version

twice, Anil's fragmented description once, and, in the denouement, the villain's nameless lover's tale fills in the missing pieces.

The difficulty is in fixing and naming with certainty what happened to Rupa. Sunita's reconstruction, along with other narrative accounts, moves restlessly between explanations of unrequited love, a spurned lover, desire, shame, honour, homicide, suicide – and rape. Sunita infers from Rupa's account – wrongly, it is later proven – that Rupa was driven to commit suicide. Rupa's own letter, apart from expressing her desire for Rocky, is ambiguous. Rocky's later account quite plainly states that he consistently rebuffed Rupa's overtures. But one thing is clear according to Sunita: when a girl crosses the boundaries she must die. Rupa, Ruby, and Kunwar Sahib's nameless mistress all meet this fate. When Ruby dies, she lies in Rocky's arms and says it in as many words: 'My only crime, Rocky, has been that I have desired you'.

There are moments in the film when the rape threat buried within the subtext is openly enunciated. Sunita's initial discomfiture with Anil when she journeys with him (to locate Rupa's killer) turns into romantic love after he makes short shrift of a marauding gang threatening to rape her in the woods. In an earlier scene Meena, Sunita's friend, is accidentally separated from Sunita and Anil on the same journey. The camera tracks Meena's lonely figure walking through the woods, tightening the frame around her as she looks fearfully beyond its edges – a classic cinematic signification of the rape threat.

Yet the quest for Rupa's rapist, which initially propels the narrative, stops abruptly, changes course, and becomes a tale of the

Ruby, the dying vamp, in *Teesri Manzil* (1965)

accusation and redemption of an innocent man. Certainly the female protagonist, Sunita, is no defenceless woman. She sets out from her home as a woman with a purpose, a mission, to avenge her sister's death. *Teesri Manzil*, however, becomes an exploration of male anxieties of wrongful accusations, anxieties that constitute the founding principles of English common law transferred to the Empire's colonies.[16]

16 Rules governing rape trials are based on Sir Mathew Hale s opinion written to the King s Bench in 1671 since rape is a charge so easily made and so difficult for a man to defend against it must be examined with greater caution than any other crime See Susan Brownmiller s seminal *Against Our Will Men Women and Rape* (New York Bantam 1976) pp 369–70 She also cites John Henry Wigmore s *Evidence* a primary treatise on evidentiary rules which makes a similar argument

The sexed body and spe(o)cular pleasure

Before turning to the charge of masculine subterfuge employed in depicting rape scenes, I want to make an observation about the figure of the vamp – a liminal figure, favoured for decades in Hindi cinema, that significantly attenuated in the 1970s and had disappeared by the 1980s, coinciding with the emergence of the avenging woman. In a film about mystery and intrigue, the chicanery Sunita and Anil perform differs only in degree from the subterfuge in which Ruby engages. Yet Ruby is singled out as Sunita's opposite: the vamp. Ruby, a nightclub worker, makes her living as a vaudevillian. The 'difference' between Ruby and Sunita is that Sunita, because of her feminine status, is the object of desire. Ruby, however, transgresses the line: a sexualized subject with a desire of her own, she aggressively pursues the man she loves. She appropriates 'phallic power' and must pay for it with her death.

The actress Helen, who plays a Ruby-like figure in scores of films, is iconic of the vamp. In the roles she repeats again and again, Helen portrays not so much the 'wicked' woman as the 'naughty', sexually alluring, immodest one, coded by her erotic, nimbly performed dance numbers – a wonderful medley of flamenco, jazz, modern, and belly-dance movements set to adaptations of rock'n'roll or jazz rhythms. Located in the public sphere, in the world of men, she was somehow bereft of a man of her own. Desired by all, yet loved by none, she inevitably – as in *Teesri Manzil* – zeroes in on the hero in her search to be loved by one man.

Yet within the pleasures and dangers of a liminal but exciting nightlife experienced by the privileged few, Helen is the 'bad' undomesticated woman. For this she is punished with death, always an accidental act of 'fate'. Not altogether insignificant are the communal overtones of Helen's offscreen minority status as a Christian. Perceived as part of the Anglo-Indian community, an 'impure' breed that could never gain legitimacy in a society acutely conscious of 'origins', Helen plays with the pleasure and anxiety which the otherized westerners' lifestyle elicits.

Double-speak about the body

Between the moral authority of the state's censor board and preoccupation with women's bodies through strategic camera angles and movement is the gratification and scopic pleasure that filmed bodies, especially those of the vamp, offer to both male and female viewers. The vamp is presented as the sexualized woman, craving men and their attention by inviting their gaze upon herself, her body, her eroticized gestures and movements. This exhibitionism, pleasurable to the audience, is simultaneously condemned as

immodest, prurient, and 'bad'. Thus one can enjoy the visual pleasure, the spectacular and erotic dance numbers, while keeping intact a sense of moral indignation by condemning the woman in unison with the narrative.

This double-speak is evident not only in films but in the entire discursive culture surrounding films. It operates no differently in associated texts such as film magazines. During my search for secondary sources on films and film history in the Indian National Film Archives at Pune, I was struck by one preoccupation in film magazines through four decades of post-independence cinema. The industry positions itself as demanding freedom of expression and opposing censorship. At the heart of this wrangle is the contentious issue of how much the films can show – a debate that is really about nothing more than the right to show and see the woman's body. In magazines that reproduce ad nauseam stills, centrefolds, pinups, shots from films, and closeups of physical details of the female stars, the accompanying written text virtuously repudiates the industry and the film stars for their declining values. The visuals show the reader what is being decried. Such double-speak continues in the films' texts, which invite us to see and then condemn the 'bad' woman.

Culling a few candid moments from the discourse in the film magazines, I cite a film fan, who in an unusually plain-spoken way reminds us of film's nature – intrinsically and organically linked to the pleasures of voyeurism and scopophilia. In the 1940s this fan wrote unselfconsciously to the magazine *Film India* about his admiration for a new actress, Begum Para. He marvelled at her diaphanous sarees that enabled him to gaze at her magnificent breasts. In a similar vein, Pandit Indra makes a case against the puritanical censorship advocated by *Film India*'s editor and the state. The open depiction of sex and the body are, he argues, part of India's classical poetry. He quotes at length from various Hindu poets, including the fourth-century poet Kalidasa's poems in *shringaar rasa*,[17] full of descriptions of gods and goddesses, their bodies, details about their lovemaking, and frequent references to the breasts and buttocks of the amorous women. Analogously, he goes on, films 'without romance will be as tasteless as food without salt! . . . The editor should not try . . . to destroy the sweetness of our life leading us towards [the] darkness of so-called purity.'[18]

While the discourse on the extent to which films can or should 'show' (women's) bodies continues to this day, the figure of the vamp has become conspicuous by its absence. We can only speculate about the changes that prompted this. The distance travelled can be graphically measured by the extent to which the heroines substitute for the vamps. As the Helen-type figure atrophied in Hindi films during the 1970s, the female lead by the 1980s was transformed from a childlike innocent to a sexually alluring creature. In short, if heroines could satisfy what Begum Para's admirer sought in the

17 *Shringaar rasa* is the mood of love romance and sensual pleasure one of the nine *rasas* in classical Indian drama theory

18 Pandit Indra Pandit Indra advocates vulgarity! *Film India* (June 1947) pp 47–8 Writing against the editor s condemnation of the film *Parihari* (1947) he says First of all I should warn the puritan editor that he is doing the greatest injustice to the industry by exciting the Government against our pictures Does he want to turn our "Romantic industry" into [a] heartless business institution? If romance[ ] which he alleges [is] vulgarity[ ] is squeezed away[ ] what will remain? Preaching sermons? Then why go to the pictures at all? We can attend temples mosques and churches for sermons

19 This shift might lend credibility to the feminist charge that the rape scene substitutes for the vamp My own preferred reading however is that the vamp figure is at odds with a populist feminist discourse which has increasingly become Hindi film s cachet

20 Gopalan s suggestion that women s agency can be depicted without gratuitous rape scenes as in the exemplary Telegu film *Police Lock Up* (1992) is useful but does not explain the enduring success of rape revenge narratives Gopalan *Avenging women in Indian cinema* pp 57-9

21 The film has remarkable parallels with and might even be a creative adaptation of Lamont Johnson s *Lipstick* (1976) a Hollywood film with a rape-revenge theme

22 Ashish Rajyadhyaksha and Paul Willemen *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (New Delhi Oxford University Press 1996) p 416 see also my *The cinematic imagi(n)ation* pp 196-9

23 In 1979 the Supreme Court overturned a High Court ruling and freed two police constables accused of raping Mathura a minor, in police custody In 1978 a Muslim woman, Rameeza Bee was raped in police custody in Hyderabad and her husband a rickshaw puller was murdered for protesting about it In 1980 Maya Tyagi was raped in Baghpat Haryana then stripped naked and walked through the streets by the police The rape bill – the upshot of public shock and women s rage – became the Anti Rape Act in 1986 For more details see Radha Kumar *The agitation against rape A History of Doing* (New York Verso 1994) pp 127-42 and Kalpana Kannabiran *Rape and the construction of communal identity* in Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis (eds) *Embodied Violence Communalising Women s Identity in South Asia* (New Delhi Kali for Women 1996) pp 32-41

24 Barbara Ehrenreich s phrase to

movies, the vamp was redundant. Much of this had to do with changing boundaries within rules governing sexuality: the boundaries 'good' women could occupy expanded slightly. Eroticizing the heroine marked a new trend, the vamp's figure was thereafter banished from Hindi films [19]

Women's rage

Feminist anxieties about constructing vengeful heroines through rape-revenge narratives in the 1980s circle around eroticizing rape scenes, and perpetuating a victim syndrome while masquerading the revenge as female agency.[20] I propose that a historical approach might be helpful here Comparing these films to their antecedents – the classic *Aradhana*-style victim, or the inscription erasure in *Teesri Manzil* – not only plots elements of continuity and change underscoring the industry's obvious generic impulse for repetition and difference, but more importantly accounts for a broader discursive context of which these films are a part. Reverence no longer serves as sufficient compensation for the suffering victim woman.

Insaaf ka Taraazu[21] is indeed, as Lalitha Gopalan argues, the 'inaugural moment' in rape-revenge films. She, among others,[22] points to the Mathura rape trial as structuring the context of *Insaaf ka Taraazu*'s reception. I wish to stress that context since it is, I believe, central to understanding the avenging women subgenre. The Mathura rape trial marks the resurgence of the women's movement in India, dormant since pre-independence [23] In this phase women organized spontaneously, not under male leadership; a 'grassroots female militancy'[24] forced itself onto the national agenda, using rape as a powerful trope in a national discourse on women's subjugation by individual men and institutions Nationwide agitations by women coalesced to demand changes in the 'rape laws'. The concatenate effect of this historical moment shapes the latter-day woman's film.

The maker of *Insaaf ka Taraazu*, B R Chopra, a leading auteur in the film industry since the 1950s, has carved a special niche in Hindi cinema in his explorations of gender politics through the vicissitudes of heterosexual love. Chopra's films often trace the liminal social space women occupy, questioning permissible moral boundaries even as he might carefully reinstate them. His other films that stand out in this respect are *Gumrah/Deception* (1967), *Dhund/Fog* (1973), and *Pati Patni aur Woh/Husband, Wife and the Other* (1978). *Insaaf ka Taraazu*, hot on the heels of the demand to reopen the Supreme Court's judgement in the Mathura trial, bears more than an incidental relation to the public discourse which the verdict set off. Historically, the event marks the beginning of the (re)entry of a discourse on women's place in the private and public spheres framed in terms of

describe women s enthusiastic
support for Lorena Bobbitt in her
Feminism confronts Bobbittry in
The Snarling Citizen (New York
Harper Collins 1995) p 85

25 *Bharati* derives from the word
Bharat the Hindi name for India

women's *rights* (not reform, 'uplift', or the need to nurture special 'feminine virtues').

The nation underwent a long consciousness-raising process as women challenged and rewrote discriminatory laws on domestic violence, rape, dowry, and the growing incidence of 'dowry deaths' Family courts – instituted solely to relieve conventional courts from the burden of 'family disputes' – and the soaring divorce rates were testimony to the serious 'gender trouble' stirred up by women's grassroots militancy. This ferment in gender relations features in popular films Women, albeit feminized and sexualized, were once revered for their suffering. As the decades go by, however, they are increasingly capable of violence and taking control

Insaaf ka Taraazu was released while the debate was still underway on new legislative measures to punish rape offenders and replace rape laws first established during British colonial rule The film's heroine, Bharati[25] (Zeenat Aman), winner of the 'Miss India' title, is an independent career woman, working as a model and making good money to support herself and her schoolgirl sister Nita (Padmini Kolahpure) in an apartment in Bombay. The film begins with Bharati winning a beauty contest – determined by popular mandate, the audience within the film. The man who awards her the highest score, Ramesh Gupta (Raj Babbar), receives the honour of placing the crown on her head.

Ramesh, a longstanding admirer of Bharati, uses his wealth to his advantage and makes casual efforts to be with her, while she, self-absorbed and preoccupied with her fiance Ashok, obliges Ramesh in the routine fashion that a star obliges fans. Slighted by her lack of interest one day when he visits her, Ramesh barges into her room and, in a protracted sequence, attacks her, ties her down and repeatedly rapes her. Bharati falls unconscious, and somewhere towards the end of this sequence her sister Nita comes home, sees Ramesh on top of Bharati and flees the house, fearful and confused.

When Bharati reports the incident and presses charges, her lawyer warns that loopholes in the anti-rape laws make it virtually impossible to prove the rapist's guilt. In fact the defendant's lawyer easily reinterprets the sequence of events, casting severe doubt on her lack of consent, the critical issue in all rape litigation. Bharati loses the law suit even though her lawyer is a committed and competent woman, and despite the trial's widespread publicity Shunned by advertising companies that can no longer afford to have her name associated with their products, and by her prospective in-laws, who cannot cope with the adverse publicity, Bharati leaves Bombay.

Dispirited and depressed, she relocates with her sister in Pune (a city close to Bombay) and takes a low-paid job as a secretary in a store selling firearms. Nita, meanwhile, gets an interview for a job with a prestigious firm, but the interview turns into a nightmare

when the firm's proprietor, the interviewer, is none other than Ramesh, who traps her in a room, humiliates her, and rapes her too. When Nita returns home and collapses, Bharati responds by taking a gun from the store, following Ramesh to his office, and killing him at close range, in cold blood, and in full view of his colleagues.

Bharati is arrested and tried. She refuses to hire a lawyer, choosing instead to defend herself. The court fails to recognize her due to the transformation in her appearance. In an impassioned speech about the miscarriage of justice for women, she reminds the court that she is Bharati, the model who was once raped by Ramesh Gupta. The failure to punish her rapist then, she argues, has only abetted him in victimizing another woman In a dramatic end to the court proceedings, the judge, impressed by Bharati's arguments, sets her free

In *Insaaf ka Taraazu* the victim becomes vengeful and victorious not only against the man who victimizes her but against the entire misogynist juridical system. The film examines the ramifications of rape: the fact that it is nothing but an assertion of male aggression and power; that the rape gets rehearsed both literally and figuratively in a court trial meant to punish the rapist; that the rapist gets off due to a lack of conclusive evidence, that the victim faces social ostracism along with acute depression and trauma in the aftermath, and that the crowning act of injustice is the court setting the rapist free. The film truly centres on the woman's narrative; the rapist's character is not elaborated beyond the fact that he is a well-to-do, 'normal', even pleasant person, someone whose violence leaves an unsuspecting Bharati and the audience shocked and dismayed.[26]

The narrative structure explores two possible responses to rape that popular films have deployed. First, recourse to the legal process turns out to be a farce which leads to another woman becoming a rape victim. Secondly, the film valorizes a wonderful revenge fantasy. direct action and punishment followed by success in court. In the first courtroom proceedings, *Insaaf ka Taraazu* is unequivocal in condemning the juridical-legal system. As the woman lawyer tells Bharati at the outset:

It is very hard to establish rape. That is why so many rapists go unpunished And whether or not the rapist is punished, one thing is certain, the woman definitely gets a bad name.   You may not know this, but for a woman, a court case involving rape is not very different from rape.

At the same time the lawyer invokes 'shame' and 'honour', qualities at stake for the *shareef aurat* (good woman)

Bharati's response is firm – 'I now neither care about society, nor about getting a bad name' – but she is less tough than she thinks. The defence attorney's reinterpretation of out-takes of her as a model, along with a photo series of her with Ramesh, resembles

26 Star currency is crucial in viewer expectations Ramesh Gupta played by Raj Babbar not conventionally a villain added to the quotidian nature of acquaintance rape

27 Roland Barthes *S/Z* (New York Noonday Press 1974) pp 3–9

Barthes's principle of writerly texts.[27] Her photographs, he argues, demonstrate the inner logic of an alluring sex object and a 'modern' woman's permissive lifestyle. The defendant's lawyer badgers her for the 'improper' conduct demonstrated by her choosing a profession in which she displays her body. When Ramesh is set free for lack of sufficient evidence, Bharati sinks into a depression, unable to cope with the publicity following the debacle in court, or with a job requiring she suffuse consumer products with her charm

It is the second time around, when Nita gets raped by Ramesh Gupta for daring to testify against him in court, that Bharati takes direct action. Nita, making a career as a stenographer, is no model selling her body. As Bharati's lawyer states before she takes up the case 'A woman has to stand up some day and say she has the right to say, "No", and no man can touch her without her consent'. Yet the first half of the film obfuscates this point, particularly through Ramesh's lawyer's vociferous argument in court. By posing extraneous issues such as Bharati's professional career as a model and the sexualization of her body that inheres to that career, the film implies a difficulty in demarcating consent from a woman's prior conduct.[28]

Compared to both Bharati's and Nita's brutal rapes, involving terror, pain, humiliation and a tortured aftermath, Bharati's swift action against Ramesh seems painless. The film does not escalate the horror and cruelty that Hollywood slasher films and, to a lesser extent, latter-day rape-revenge Hindi films indulge in.[29] What the film carefully implants, however, is a woman character, once a victim, but now ready to fight back. It is she (initially through a female lawyer) who takes up the fight, not her boyfriend, the police, or her father

28 'Conduct' was critical to the Supreme Court s verdict in the Mathura s rape trial According to the judges Mathura s 'boyfriends and sexual liaisons prior to her rape pointed to her loose conduct It was therefore difficult the argument went to establish whether she had consented to sex with the constables or not In 1989 the courts again ruled against Rameeza Bee on the same grounds See Kannabiran Rape and the construction of communal identity pp 32–41 and Vimal Balasubrahmanyan *In Search of Justice Women Law Landmark Judgements and Media* (Bombay Shubhada Saraswat Prakashan 1990) pp 107–53

29 *Anjaam/Consequence* (1994) is held up as exemplary in this respect though several other films *Pratighaat/Retribution* (1987) *Zakhmi Aurat/Wounded Woman* (1988) *Haq/Rights* (1991) and *Damini/Lightning* (1994) fit this female avenging category

The weakest point in the film is the last sequence when Bharati makes her impassioned speech in court against rape. She likens women to temples of worship; each time a woman is violated, she says, a religious shrine is desecrated. In the montage of visuals that accompany her soliloquy, we witness a church, a Hindu temple and a mosque crumbling This allusion to women as symbols of (men's) religious communities is disconcerting, if not downright dangerous While the film text elsewhere attempts to undermine patriarchal ideology, here it suddenly falls into the trap of rejecting rape not because it is a uniquely perverse assertion of men's power but because women, the victims, are likened to religious shrines The film suddenly and unexpectedly concludes with an insidious thesis on rape. Rather than laying bare the connection between rape and patriarchy, it ends up invoking extant patriarchal discourses within Hindu tradition that place women in binary positions as the *devi* or *dasi* (goddess or slave). Holding women up as objects of reverence is posited as a counterpoint to rape, rather than as a continuum within patriarchal discourse. This aspect of the film is more reprehensible than the depiction of rape protested by Indian feminists, which I discuss later.

Clearly, despite the film ending with a tirade about reverence for women, what was new in *Insaaf* was that the woman, a victim such as those in the genre of Hindi films from *Mother India* to *Aradhana*, turned into a vigilante. In the 1980s, the avenging woman figure became a trend· the 'angry woman' replacing the 'angry man' of the 1970s Carol Clover, in the US context, points to the appearance of 'rape-revenge' films as popular culture's response to the women's movement – feminism's gift to popular culture.

> The marriage of rape to revenge was made in movie heaven   .
> Ironically enough, it was a marriage for which the matchmaker
> was the women's movement, for in terms more or less explicitly
> feminist, rape became not only a deed deserving of brutal
> retribution, but a deed that women themselves (not cops,
> boyfriends, or fathers) undertook to redress.[30]

It was perhaps this innovation, the introduction of rape to the revenge schema, already a staple of popular Hindi cinema, that made *Insaaf ka Taraazu* popular, spawning a veritable new subgenre. It led the way to fusing themes of sexual violence/rape – a handy (though not exclusive) trope[31] to excoriate and expose the pervasive violence (between classes) and corruption (within institutions) that humiliated heroines avenge. Although rape appeared in earlier films, it was never at the centre of the narrative, and even when it was salient, allusions to its reality were carefully repressed. The rape *threat*, hovering in the margin of pre-1980s films like *Teesri Manzil,* is seized upon and made central in the 1980s Women exterminating men appeared in earlier films, such as *Mother India* and *Mamta/Maternal Love* (1965)[32] However, in these films women's fury and power service conservative patriarchal ideals apotheosizing motherhood Here women are objects of reverential fervour rather than agents exacting revenge in the name of womankind

Judged by its production values, *Insaaf ka Taraazu* is unusually poor, which comes as a surprise, given that the film was made by B R. Chopra, a seasoned director. Aman's method acting, meant to convey a post-rape depressive stupor, lacks credibility. The song sequences fill out a parsimonious storyline, in contrast with Hindi cinema's usual multiple subplots that weave together during three hours of screen time. Furthermore, the long takes, virtually static camera, and flat three-key lighting make the film visually uninteresting.

Showing rape – the double victim

As feminists we are caught between a rock and a hard place. the erasure of rape from the narrative bears the marks of a patriarchal discourse on honour and chastity, yet showing rape, some argue,

30 Carol Clover High and low the transformation of the rape revenge movie in Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (eds) *Women and Film a Sight and Sound Reader* (Philadelphia PA Temple University Press 1993) p 76

31 Inevitably a woman s body registers violation or injury of one kind or another In *Pratighaat* and *Damini* neither protagonist is raped The protagonist in *Pratighaat* is disrobed in public and in *Damini* a working class woman is raped by members of the upper class protagonist s family In *Haq* the protagonist has a miscarriage and the public and private conflicts coalesce when she takes on her politician husband responsible for the miscarriage

32 Rosie Thomas refers to Radha levelling a gun to kill her own son in *Mother India* s denouement as the most powerfully horrifying image See her Sanctity and scandal the mythologization of *Mother India* Quarterly Review of Film and Video no 11 (1989) pp 11–30 In *Mamta* a Madame X style variant of *Aradhana* the protagonist/mother kills her extortionist husband and is defended in court by her long lost daughter The mother dies moments after learning that her daughter at last recognizes her maternal sacrifice

eroticizes it for the male gaze and purveys the victim myth. How do we refuse to erase the palpability of rape and negotiate the splintering of the private/public trauma associated with it? *Insaaf* came under fire from Indian feminists because the fictional representation of rape elided the reality of underclass women's rape by the state (police or warring armies). Further, a (commercial) filmmaker's intervention in a discourse forced upon the nation by women was viewed as opportunism, which feminists found particularly odious. Equally, feminists who had seen (or not seen) the film roundly declared that the filmic depiction of rape could only titillate and entertain male viewers.[33]

Some of these criticisms are valid; still, too much gets thrown out with the bath water. It is no accident that *Insaaf* chose an upmarket model as the victim of rape. By showing a woman voluntarily 'selling' herself in the world of advertising, the film operates through the same double-speak discussed earlier. Popular cinema in general focuses on the lives of the rich and famous, just as alternative cinema is conversely obsessed with portraying the lives of the poor, the subaltern. By focusing on Bharati, played by Zeenat Aman who herself won the 'Miss Asia' title in 1969, the film plays on extratextual information that the audience has about the star, and situates itself in the space between Aman's real life and the character she plays on screen. *Insaaf*, unlike *Teesri Manzil* or *Aradhana*, set the new trend of eroticizing the heroine's body. Bharati's job of striking poses, openly flaunting herself before the camera, centres attention on her body. The centrality of Bharati/Aman's body (mis)leads the audience into drawing incorrect conclusions regarding beauty, desire, lust and rape. The subtext of this is the most insidious

Bharati, the eroticized heroine, in *Insaaf ka Taraazu* (1980)

33 This recapitulation is based on my participation as an activist in the women's movement through the 1980s Rajyadhyaksha echoes this sentiment in his writeup on the film 'The three rape sequences staged with voyeuristic relish, no doubt contributed to its commercial success' Rajyadhyaksha and Willemen, *The Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, p 416

of rape myths: 'she asked for it'. While such a critique rings true, it is equally pertinent that the film's second half subverts the argument of the first half.

When a humdrum, low-paid existence replaces Bharati's glamorous lifestyle after the courtroom fiasco, her little sister Nita gets a hard-won interview with a prestigious firm. It is of course a setup, an occasion for Ramesh Gupta to assert his personal vendetta against Nita for testifying against him in court. If initially the film makes confused connections between lust, desire and rape on the one hand, and women's culpability on the other, this latter part of the film clearly deflects such a thesis. Nita represents the position of millions of women in lowly, underpaid positions, acutely vulnerable to men with power.

Regarding the rape scene's imbrication in representations of the already (sexually) coded woman's body, I disagree with Indian feminists who argue that the rape sequence in *Insaaf* is titillating. Although protracted, it conveys nothing but pain, horror and naked male aggression. The rape is unquestionably gruesome. When Ramesh enters Bharati's bedroom he intimidates her and his intentions are soon clear. As she protests, 'No, no', Ramesh taunts, 'Yes, yes . . . beauty queen. . . . Now kiss me.' Bharati at first fights back, then breaks down and finally passes out. She lies on the floor on the other side of the bed; in view are her feet tied to the bed, her head thrown back in an expression of terror that turns to numbness from exhaustion as Ramesh stays on top of her. When Ramesh is done with Bharati, he cuts the cords used to tie her to the bed, dresses and leaves.

Mary Ann Doane discusses the impasse confronting feminist

Bharati', brutally raped, in
Insaaf ka Taraazu

34 Mary Ann Doane Woman s stake filming the female body in Constance Penley (ed) *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York Routledge 1988) pp 216 225 226

35 Gopal s sensitive iteration of the confusion unleashed by competing claims between Phoolan Devi s pain the invasion of her privacy and the commodification of her narrative in *Bandit Queen* point to the profound contradiction wherein rape is experienced as a private trauma despite the women s movement s effort to view it as a public issue a manifestation of quotidian power structures and relations Gopal Of victims and vigilantes pp 96–7

36 Jonathan Dollimore The cultural politics of perversion Augustine Shakespeare Freud Foucault *Genders* no 8 (1990) pp 2–16 quoted in Linda Williams Film bodies gender genre and excess in Barry Grant (ed) *Film Genre Reader II* (Austin TX University of Texas Press 1995) p 148

filmmakers (or theorists for that matter) that stems from a theoretical discourse which denies the neutrality of the cinematic apparatus itself. 'A machine for the production of image and sounds, the cinema generates and guarantees pleasure by a corroboration of the spectator's identity . [an] identity . . bound up with that of the voyeur and the fetishist.' She points to essentialist and anti-essentialist theories wherein the former presume and aim to restore representation of the female form in 'images which provide a pure reflection of woman', while the anti-essentialist refuses 'any attempt to figure or represent that body', since the female body is always already and inescapably coded, written, overdetermined.

In her attempt to go beyond this impasse Doane identifies the stakes involved as 'not simply concerned with the isolated image of the body . rather, the syntax which constitutes the body as a term' [34] In *Insaaf*, the rape scene's mise-en-scene, attacked so vociferously by feminists, refuses to indulge the voyeur's fetishistic gaze, *without* neglecting to 'show' the brutality of rape. Its 'syntax' distances it from the 'mandatory rape scenes' reviled in Hindi films. Displacing elliptical references to rape in the Richardson/Forster tradition, pushing rape into the public domain and refusing its status as a private matter are unequivocal gains made by the women's movement.[35]

Yet scopophilic pleasure in rape representations is still a tangled issue. Linda Williams offers a psychoanalytic explanation of melodrama (weepies), horror, and pornography, three 'body genres' which she classifies by their convulsive impact on the body – tears, fear, and orgasm, or the 'tearjerker', 'fearjerker' and texts 'some people might be inclined to "jerk off"' to. Williams draws attention to the perversions that these genres draw upon: masochism in melodrama, an oscillation between sadism and masochism in horror, and sadism, at least in the anti-pornography group's perception of pornography. Williams, however, urges us to see

the value of not invoking the perversions as terms of condemnation As even the most cursory reading of Freud shows, sexuality is, by definition, perverse The 'aims' and 'objects' of sexual desire are often obscure and inherently substitutive. Unless we are willing to see reproduction as the common goal of sexual drive, then we all have to admit, as Jonathan Dollimore has put it, that we are all perverts Dollimore's goal of retrieving the 'concept of perversion as a category of cultural analysis', as a structure intrinsic to all sexuality rather than extrinsic to it, is crucial to any attempt to understand cultural forms . . in which fantasy predominates.[36]

Invoking Clover's reading of the horror genre, Ghosh points to the difficulty of fixing (gender) identification among viewers and Gopalan concedes the viewer's oscillation between masochism in

37 Ghosh Deviant pleasures and
disorderly women , p 176
Gopalan Avenging women in
Indian cinema p 53

rape and sadism in revenge sequences.[37] Even if we concede to a
variety of permutations and combinations in the masochistic/sadistic
viewing positions – masochistic identification with rape, sadistic
identification with revenge or vice versa, an improbable but not
impossible masochistic identification with rape and revenge, or in the
'worst case scenario' a sadistic incitement in the rape and revenge
sequences – it is not clear what is at stake for us as feminists. What
are our anxieties about the effects of spectatorial arousal?

We might reconsider our own anxieties about the rape scene and
focus instead on various other moments in the first half of *Insaaf*
(especially the advertising agency's filming) that fetishize the female
body as an object of the male gaze. The onus of such a construction
shifts to a different filmmaking mode – advertising – and its
recipients, the generalized consumer's scopophiliac gratification,
rather than the male's gaze. Bharati's post-rape depression interrupts
her ability to glow for the camera and infuse consumer products with
her radiance, motivating the second half of the film. Racialized

38 Anupama Chopra and Farah
Bana The beauty craze India
Today 15 November 1996
pp 20–29

beauty myths and proliferating beauty pageants,[38] currently offering
women dramatic upward mobility from India's small towns to
metropolitan penthouses, are aspects *Insaaf* clairvoyantly signals
This naturalized body/beauty myth combines far more pernicious
aspects of patriarchy, capital and commodification.

I draw a distinction here between the fetishization and sublimation
of women's bodies for consumer commodities in advertising, and
felicitations of the body as a site of intimacy, pleasure and desire. In
the 1980s, the sexualized Hindi film heroine was no longer punished
as was the phallic vamp for satisfying specular desires – to see
women's bodies – as Pandit Indra candidly states. Previous female
stars' feigned lack of awareness about their bodies gave way to
teasing consciously the limits of, and the pleasure in, 'showing' In
the 1990s, bawdy film songs are further pushing the boundaries of
sexualized public discourse Playing off the ribaldry in the *rasiya*
tradition, these songs celebrate the *risqué* once associated with the
peasantry and folk music. Displacing earlier decades of film music's
lilting poetry fashioned by a refined urbane sensibility, these tongue-
in-cheek lyrics reflect the trouble between the sexes, as well as
women's pleasure in being both the objects *and subjects* of desire

Bharati's courtroom tirade at the end of the film results in more
than a symbolic victory. The judge ruefully admits the court's (read
Indian state's) failure towards women and sets Bharati free. The
sequence's extreme lack of credibility undermines it and fails to
vindicate the original indictment of the judicial system. Yet a lot has
changed since the self-punishing Vandana in *Aradhana* a decade
before quietly acquiesced to a twelve-year incarceration for defending

39 Christine Glendhill (ed) Home Is
Where the Heart Is (London
British Film Institute 1987) and
Landy (ed) Imitations of Life

herself against rape. If melodrama condenses profound public/private
conflicts, at once exposing and reaffirming power relations,[39] it is
also a vivid emotional register in Hindi films. In *Aradhana,* the

Vandana, offered reverence, in
Aradhana

Bharati, taking revenge, in
Insaaf ka Taraazu

centrality of affect shored up by the profilmic masculine fantasy acknowledges patriarchal oppression and proffers reverence in the form of a grand award from the state (fusing mother/nation/state) – an awkward and phantasmic compensation. On the other hand in the post-1980s woman's film, nothing short of 'sweet revenge' compensates for women's suffering.

The 1980s rape-revenge film, fuelled by women's rage, dramatizes a public discourse which repudiates victimization and patriarchy, and is distinct from the pre-1980s obsessive 'inscription' and 'erasure' of sexual violence, *Teesri Manzil*-style. The topos of rape, a weapon

40 As Clover argues in popular cinema s redefinition rape [is] less an act of sex than an act of power Clover *Men Women and Chainsaws* p 153

41 Susie Tharu Third world women s cinema notes on narrative reflections on opacity *Economic and Political Weekly* 17 May 1986 p 866

42 Hindi cinema is wont to represent feminist discourses as well as participate in the backlash against such discourses

against the weak, is used by filmmakers as a rhetorical trope to conjure images of power, coercion and humiliation in conflicts between the culturally powerless and powerful.[40] Yet domination/subordination, as Priyamvada Gopal points out in the context of *Bandit Queen*, is not an eternal category but an unstable one, and the vengeful action fulfils this prophecy. Nor is 'meaning', and here I reiterate her invocation of Susie Tharu. 'so much total expression as a tension, a difference from that which went before' [41]

I am contending that the historical context is crucial to understanding the arrival of the avenging woman's film, its success and role in the circulation of discourses between representation and reality [42] In the films I have discussed – from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – I see the discourse on womanhood on an orbit from reverence to rape, and then revenge. It is no accident that the sharp reaction to Mathura's rape in 1978 spearheaded the women's movement. Gopalan's anguish is that within the Hindi film narrative it takes a woman's rape to permit revenge Ironically, and rather more ominously, the rape-revenge genre's history reflects an unhappy reality. It took Mathura's (and Rameeza Bee's and Maya Tyagi's) rape for the nation to focus attention on women's rage organized as a movement.

From 'figurative males' to action heroines: further thoughts on active women in the cinema

ELIZABETH HILLS

> *Hudson·* Hey, Vasquez, have you ever been mistaken for a man?
> *Vasquez·* No Have you?
> *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986)

This now famous quote neatly captures the confusion and uncertainty surrounding the transgressive character of the action heroine.[1] Smarter, tougher and better equipped than both the traditional heroines of the action genre and many of their contemporary male counterparts, action heroines are a new breed of arse-kicking female protagonists in action genre films Aggressive, heroic and transformative characters such as Ripley from the *Alien* series, Sarah Connor from *Terminator 2· Judgment Day* (James Cameron, 1991), Rebecca from *Tank Girl* (Rachel Talalay, 1995), Morgan Adams from *Cutthroat Island* (Renny Harlan, 1995), both *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) all of the *Bad Girls* (Jonathan Kaplan, 1994) and, more recently, Samantha/Charlie from *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlan, 1996) transgress both cinematic genre codes and cultural gender codes which position female characters as the passive, immobile and peripheral characters of Hollywood action cinema. Although these powerfully transgressive characters open up interesting questions about the fluidity of gendered identities and changing popular cinematic representations of women, action heroines are often described within feminist film theory as 'pseudo males' or as being not 'really' women

2 Carol Clover *Men Women and Chainsaws Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London British Film Institute 1992)

This paper argues that one of the reasons why action heroines have been difficult to conceptualize as heroic *female* characters is the binaristic logic of the theoretical models on which a number of feminist theorists have relied. For example, feminists working within the dominant theoretical model of psychoanalysis have had extremely limited spaces within which to discuss the transformative and transgressive potential of the action heroine. This is because psychoanalytic accounts which theorize sexual difference within the framework of linked binary oppositions (active male/passive female) necessarily position normative female subjectivity as passive or in terms of lack. From this perspective, active and aggressive women in the cinema can only be seen as phallic, unnatural or 'figuratively male'.[2]

However, female action heroes confound binaristic logic in a number of ways, for they access a range of emotions, skills and abilities which have traditionally been defined as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'. As female characters who take up the central spaces in the traditionally 'masculine' genre of action cinema, they derive their power from their ability to think and live creatively, their physical courage and their strategic uses of technology For these reasons I argue that action heroines cannot easily be contained, or productively explained, within a theoretical model which denies the possibility of female subjectivity as active or full.

Working against the traditional binaristic component of psychoanalysis, I want to suggest that the transgressive and transformative potential of these female characters cannot be appreciated via habitual readings or conventional theoretical modes which claim to know in advance what female bodies are capable of doing or what can be said about them. As a corollary, I will argue that some new mode of understanding has to be developed to take account of the new and changing representations of women in the action cinema. From my perspective, action heroines represent something of a methodological crisis for feminist film theory and its theorizing of active and aggressive female characters, opening up an interesting set of questions regarding the ongoing need to critique and transform the theories we use.

Inevitably in an essay of this scope there will be some generalizations For this reason I think it important to signal that my aim here is not to belittle other feminist work or dismiss psychoanalytic frameworks, but rather to show how feminist film theory is developed and transformed in a context where previous feminist research plays an integral and indispensable role in the articulation of contemporary feminist concerns This is simply to acknowledge the fact that if earlier feminists had not appropriated dualistic theories to examine active women in film, then the difficulties inherent in this project would not have come to light. The theoretical framework I am adopting here assumes and responds to

these difficulties, not as a final 'correct' approach, but as a new development in the necessarily dynamic field of feminist film theory.

With this agenda in mind, I will first examine the limitations and consequences of discussing active heroines from within binaristic frameworks, such as psychoanalysis, which position active female characters as phallic or 'figuratively male' Then, using Gilles Deleuze's notion of becoming, I work outwards from an exploration of Ripley from the *Alien* series towards a theoretical position which allows for action heroines to be conceptualized as transformative, transgressive and heroic. From this basis, I argue for the need constantly to reflect upon the usefulness of our theoretical constructions and practices in order to engage with new characters and changing contexts My critique of psychoanalytic models and exploration of the usefulness of non-binaristic post-psychoanalytic alternatives is motivated, then, by the need to think differently about active and aggressive heroines in order to create new ways of conceptualizing transgressive female characters.

For a number of reasons I have chosen to focus these issues through the character of Ripley Ripley is, of course, a highly transgressive, transformative and controversial character. As, arguably, the first 'action heroine' of her type, she entered our cultural imaginary almost twenty years ago and continues to be a significant cultural icon. Whilst there have been many examples of active women in action genres (ranging from Emma Peel of *The Avengers* to the fashionable heroines of *Charlie's Angels*) the action heroine as I analyse her here emerged with Ripley from the *Alien* series. *Alien* is what Thomas Schatz calls a 'new Hollywood blockbuster'.[3] a complete package with elaborate special effects, thirty-million dollar budget, expensive pre-release publicity and, most importantly, huge box-office success. It generated a series of (so far) three sequels, and Ripley has become one of Hollywood's most visible action heroines.

Her role as heroic female lead has generated a great deal of controversy and critical interest ranging from a symposium whose papers were published in *Science Fiction Studies*[4] through to a major psychoanalytical reading in *Screen*.[5] Ripley has been an important site over which changing theoretical responses to sexual difference and film have been mapped. Whilst this paper aims to continue this project by linking Ripley to a new theoretical framework, the *main* reason I choose to focus on her is because of her ability to adapt to the new· to negotiate change. Ripley illustrates the importance of creative thinking in response to the new signs which occur in her environment, a willingness to experiment with new modes of being and the ability to transform herself in the process. She provides a spectacular example of the kind of dynamic subjectivity which I see as being crucial for feminist film theory.

The importance of creating a new reading position through which

3 Thomas Schatz The new Hollywood in J Collins H Radner and A Preacher Collins (eds) *Film Theory Goes to the Movies* (London Routledge 1993) pp 8–36

4 C Elkins Symposium on *Alien Science Fiction Studies* vol 7 no 3 (1980) pp 275–97
5 Barbara Creed, Horror and the monstrous-feminine an imaginary abjection *Screen* vol 28 no 2 (1986) pp 47–67

to explore the ambiguities and complexities of the action heroine can be illustrated in a brief discussion of the film – and various responses to it – which first introduced this figure: *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) In *Alien,* the first of the series, the small crew aboard a corporation cargo ship, the *Nostromo,* are awakened from hyper sleep by the ship's computer 'Mother' who, following company orders and without the knowledge of the crew, has rerouted their mission to a derelict spaceship in order to collect a hostile alien life-form for the company's weapons division Following what they believe is a distress call, three of the crew (Captain Dallas, Lieutenant Kane and crew-member Lambert) investigate the alien ship. Here they discover a room filled with thousands of alien eggs. Kane, looking into one, is infected by an alien organism On returning to the mother ship, the three crew are temporarily quarantined by Ripley until her order is overturned by Ash (the crew's Science Officer who has secretly been ordered by the Corporation to harvest the alien and to treat the human crew as expendable). Within days, a juvenile alien gestates in Kane's body, violently escapes through his chest cavity and quickly metamorphoses into a large, monstrous, acid-dripping predator who viciously kills most of the crew.

To a significant degree, suspense is generated in the film by the lack of knowledge regarding the characters: there is an absolute uncertainty of what particular bodies are capable of. For example, when the outer casing of the alien falls off Kane's face, Ripley contests Ash's decision to examine it for science by arguing that 'it drips acid for blood' Who knows what it is capable of when it is dead?' Like the characters, the spectator/critic also has to learn how to negotiate a way around the unknown figure of the alien. However, the spectator/critic also has another uncoded figure to negotiate: the figure of Ripley when, more than halfway through the film, she emerges as the hero and the sole surviving member of the crew.[6] Whilst Hollywood convention leads the audience to assume that it will be Dallas (as both captain and a man) who will ultimately defeat the alien, his death is a dramatic and significant break with the codes of the hero stereotype. Indeed, it is not until the last man (the most obvious choice for hero) is killed that Ripley emerges as the central 'heroic' character. We find out what her body is capable of when she not only defends herself from the alien but manages to destroy it

In stepping into the place of the hero, Ripley becomes a character, in Rebecca Bell-Metereau's words, 'so foreign as to be unrecognizable to most popular critics'.[7] Ripley's female body challenges and disrupts the tradition of heroes as necessarily male, and undermines any certainty about what she can or will do. As a new sign within the genre she interrupts the ease of an automatic reading of her image and disrupts what Gilles Deleuze calls the 'sensory-motor logic' of genre cinema.[8] Despite the unfamiliarity of

6 In this sense the film uses an important narrative convention of the slasher film that is the figure of Ripley as final girl Like the slasher film much of the confusion and anxiety generated in *Alien* comes from the absence of clear central characters See Clover *Men Women and Chainsaws*

7 Rebecca Bell-Mertereau Women the other alien in *Alien* in Jane B Weedman (ed) *Women Worldwalkers New Dimensions in SF and Fantasy* (Luddock Texas Tech Press 1985) p 10

8 Gilles Deleuze *Cinema 1 the Movement Image* trans H Tomlinson and R Galeta (London The Athlone Press 1986) pp 205–15

this new sign, and the fact that *Alien* and its sequels were clearly doing something different in terms of the female-as-hero, a number of critics have utilized conventional binaristic readings of the film's theme of heroism/transformation and its relation to female subjectivity

Indeed, to some feminist theorists Ripley is not able to function as *both* female and heroic. In this context she has been read as phallic, and therefore figuratively male, or as eroticized, and therefore regressive rather than transgressive Various responses to the final scenes of *Alien* – which focus on the battle between Ripley and the monster – highlight the dichotomous logic of these reading positions, generating considerable discussion and controversy over whether Ripley maintains her status as active subject or is recuperated into a more traditional feminine role as sexualized object.

Judith Newton's unease about Ripley's transgressive status, for example, reflects the dominant theoretical framework of psychoanalysis and the positioning of women within it. Whilst Newton recognizes *Alien* as a potentially transformative text, this recognition is a precursor to doubt about the value or radical nature of Ripley and, by extension, the film. Newton argues that *Alien* is a:

> transformational work on social and political anxieties and fantasies ... which is at once wish-fulfilling or utopian and protectively repressive in its thrust. The most obviously utopian element is its casting of a female character in the role of the individualist hero, a role conventionally played by, and in this case specifically written for, a male.[9]

Newton acknowledges that Ripley is in many ways a 'fine and thrilling hero' then, but also argues that she is ultimately 'robbed her of her radical thrust'.[10] Newton makes this claim because of the film's conclusion which, she suggests, 'subtly reinvests Ripley with traditionally feminine qualities',[11] when she is shown not only 'irrationally' risking her life to save the cat but also stripped down to her underwear The argument that these traditionally 'feminine' actions and images rob Ripley of her 'radical thrust' suggests an either/or logic which acknowledges neither the transgressive potential nor the desirability of accessing a range of roles, skills and emotions.

Ros Jennings's psychoanalytically based analysis of *Alien* also identifies an incompatibility or regressive tension between the masculine and feminine traits displayed by Ripley. Describing Ridley Scott's direction of the final sequence she argues that.

> Although he chose to make her [Ripley] the hero of the film, he also chose to inscribe her in such a way as to neutralize the significance of her threat in ascending to the male domain of movie hero By rendering her available to male voyeurism, Scott's control of filming in the final scene ensures that in addition to the

9 Judith Newton Feminism and anxiety in *Alien* in Annette Kuhn (ed) *Alien Zone Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London Verso 1990) pp 82–90 p 82

10 Ibid p 87

11 Ibid

12 Ros Jennings *Desire and design*
Ripley undressed in Tamsin
Wilton (ed) *Immortal/Invisible
Lesbians and the Moving Image*
(London Routledge 1995)
p 197

13 Tasker *Spectacular Bodies*

14 Clover, *Men Women and
Chainsaws* p 117

15 Ibid p 53

'so-called' masculine traits of bravery, technical ability and so on – she now signifies a wholly intelligible form of femininity.[12]

Far from celebrating Ripley's access to both masculine and feminine qualities, Jennings reads Ripley's 'femininity' as disqualifying her as a hero. Because Ripley is shown to be vulnerable *as well as* brave she can be only a token hero. However, as Yvonne Tasker has argued, this play of vulnerability and strength is characteristic of the action hero/heroine.[13] Indeed, it is during her final confrontation with the alien that Ripley is most visibly an action heroine for, stripped down to her underwear, she presents audiences with an image of a female character who is *both* victim and her own rescuer: a character which breaks down the hierarchical division of active-male/passive-female. Whilst shots of Ripley in her bikini briefs certainly eroticize her image, her *actions* supply a strong counter-narrative. In other words, not only does Ripley put on a space suit before doing battle with the alien, she also single-handedly *defeats* it.

However, even when theorists focus on what Ripley is *doing* rather than what she is *wearing*, the dichotomous logic of the psychoanalytic framework again demands that she is conceptualized in negative terms within the masculine/feminine binary One such response to the transgressive figure of Ripley has been to argue that she is actually phallicized, or reconstituted as masculine. This argument is utilized by Carol Clover in her analysis of the character of the 'final girl' of the slasher film, of which she uses Ripley as an example. Whilst describing the 'final girl' as intelligent, resourceful and able to save herself without outside assistance – male or otherwise – Clover does not allow these active heroines to be defined as normatively female. Using a Freudian psychoanalytic framework and predominantly concerned with the male spectator's processes of identification with the 'final girl', she argues that castration anxiety is resolved by regendering the heroine as masculine, that is phallicizing her through her use of guns, knives, machetes, chainsaws and so on, to defeat whatever or whoever is threatening her.[14] In summarizing this figurative reading Clover argues·

> Figuratively seen, the Final Girl is a male substitute in things oedipal, a homoerotic stand-in ... to the extent she means 'girl' at all, it is only for purposes of signifying male lack, and even that meaning is nullified in the final scenes ... The discourse is wholly masculine, and females figure into it only insofar as they 'read' some aspect of male experience. To applaud the Final Girl as a feminist development, as some reviews of *Aliens* have done with Ripley, is, in light of her figurative meaning, a particularly grotesque expression of wishful thinking.[15]

Here not only Ripley, but feminist approaches which read her as a positive and transformative *female* character, are found lacking and

dismissed, and the active heroine, no matter how courageous and desiring, is forced to perform the role of lack which is necessary within this phallocentric framework In other words, Clover can read Ripley and other 'final girls' as paradigmatic of figurative males only because she sees resourcefulness and aggression as 'masculine' traits, and guns and technology as compensating for some original lack It seems to me that this type of reading attempts to impose a rigid and habituated explanation onto a new and alternative figure. This is an example of what Deleuze calls a 'philosophy of capture'[16] in which the innovation of a new concept is contained and interpreted in an endless being-made-what-one-is-*a priori*. The use of phallocentric logic to position resourceful, intelligent and courageous female survivors as 'figuratively male' seems to me to be a 'particularly grotesque' form of selection and interpretation and one which has severe political consequences for feminist film theory.

The questions that must be asked are. what is at stake in relying on a methodological model which defines normative female subjectivity in terms of lack, stasis and passivity, and active subjectivity as necessarily phallic? What readings of active female characters have these theories made possible and maintained? What readings do these theories close off? Are there ways of reconceptualizing female desire and subjectivity as productive, transformative and active? The writings of Deleuze seem to offer hope for such a theoretical framework. His stated agenda of transforming the field of western philosophy through disengaging the binary logic of Platonism is designed to affirm the positivity of difference and to account for change and changing contexts. Deleuze also offers a pragmatic and productive conception of the body which is very different to the psychoanalytic view, for, as Elizabeth Grosz has observed, in contrast to the psychoanalytic model it is not a matter of what a body is – what organs it has – but what it creates and produces; what it connects with and what it does.[17]

For Deleuze, then, the body lived to its fullest potential is not organized according to the particular organs it has, indeed for him it is a 'Body without Organs' consisting instead of a multiplicity of independent parts, what he calls 'desiring-machines' – which can connect and reconnect with other machines, elements or objects from multiple frames of reference to produce particular types of 'assemblages' – such as the assemblage of women and technology. From a Deleuzian perspective, it makes no sense to read technology, such as a gun, as a fixed referent for the phallus Rather it can be understood as part of a machinic connection: a woman's hand forming an assemblage with a gun. This has nothing to do with the attempted compensation for some original 'lack' but, rather, it is an activity which produces a new 'body'. In this model, transformation occurs when repetition is replaced by difference through the dynamic assemblage of diverse elements and forces Because these

16 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia trans Brian Massumi (Minneapolis MN University of Minnesota Press 1987) pp 424–73

17 Elizabeth Grosz A thousand tiny sexes feminism and rhizomatics in C Boundas and D Olkowski (eds) Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy (New York Routledge 1994) p 194

assemblages are not restrained by expectations about 'appropriate' behaviours or connections, they can be associated with contesting notions of gendered identity and fixed subjectivity. Rather than a state of mere being, then, Deleuze posits a notion of 'becoming' which is the process of transformation created when a body disconnects from its habituated modes of acting and thinking in favour of a multiple and changing process of experimentation.[18]

As a critical strategy, Deleuze's characterization of the body asserts more than the positive nature of non-hierarchical difference over negatively binaristic models. The emphasis on fluid boundaries, dynamic interaction and transformation is also an empowering brand of corporealism which has important resonances for theorizing the female body. For, as Grosz has pointed out, if the body can be reconceptualized as a site of experimentation and transformation, then this means that the female body is capable of being imagined outside the notions of 'passive', 'lack' and 'other'.[19]

Deleuze's notion of bodies as transgressive and transformative resonates with a number of the characters across the *Alien* films, for throughout, the series displays an extremely complex use of corporealism so that bodies cannot satisfactorily be reduced to discrete unities or binaristic notions of human or non-human, or essentialist frameworks of specifically male or female characteristics or identities. For example, the alien has been coded as *both* masculine and feminine. Indeed, Barbara Creed reads it as both phallic and the 'toothed vagina' that she describes in her excellent analysis of the *Monstrous Feminine*[20] Elsewhere in her writings Creed has also referred to Ripley as a hybrid character, that is, *both* male/hero *and* female/victim.[21] Like the alien, then, Ripley is a complex and transgressive both/and figure rather than the oppositional either/or figure of traditional gender codes Conceptualized as a Body without Organs, she no longer moves within the framework that determines her identity from the established codes of masculinity/femininity. Indeed, across the four films the coupling of Ripley's body with other machines – such as weapons, computers, the now famous 'power-loader' suit and the body of the alien itself – provides the means of creating a new body which transgresses the hierarchical divisions and limitations posed by the gender system.

It is important to understand that although Ripley assumes the 'so-called' masculine privilege of active subjectivity through the process of becoming an active heroine, she is neither imitating men nor 'becoming a man'. As an active, heroic and technologically competent woman she is more similar to action heroes than she is to traditionally passive heroines, such as Lambert.[22] However, this does not make her 'figuratively male' Being composed of the speeds of action rather than the speeds of passivity, active heroines such as Ripley are becoming something other than the essentialized concept

18 Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* pp 232–309

19 Elizabeth Grosz *Volatile Bodies Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Sydney Allen and Unwin 1994)

20 Barbara Creed *The Monstrous-Feminine Film Feminism Psychoanalysis* (London Routledge 1993)
21 Barbara Creed From here to modernity feminism and postmodernism *Screen* vol 28 no 2 (1987) pp 47–67

22 Tasker *Spectacular Bodies* p 16

of *Woman* held in a mutually exclusive relation to *Man* Furthermore, if action heroines become empowered and even violent through their use of technology, this is not to say that they are somehow no longer 'really' women, but that they are intelligent and necessarily aggressive females in the context of their role as the central figures of action genre films

From this perspective, Ripley can be understood as a network of differences composed of whatever signs have been picked up and reassembled into a new active-heroine machine This assemblage of the terms 'action' and 'heroine' alters the nature of both structures and exceeds the limits of the binary and essentializing system of gender identities to become something beyond both This does not mean that she has moved beyond sexual difference to an androgynous, non-differentiated state, but, rather, to a non-hierarchical state of pure difference She becomes what Rosi Braidotti calls a 'post-*Woman* woman'[23] through operating in the productive middle space between binaries – such as *Man* and *Woman* – and, in the process, she opens up new spaces, roles and actions for women within the genre.

However, simply to view Ripley's body against a masculine/feminine distinction is to constrain the multiplicity of differences which make up her subjectivity. Indeed, across the series it is Ripley and the alien who are increasingly coded as similar. This similarity is often attached to discourses of sexual difference so that their mutual recognition in their battle for survival[24] in *Alien* becomes a fight between two 'mothers' in *Aliens* (James Cameron, 1986), until in the third film (David Fincher, 1992), they *both* signify the 'monstrous feminine'.[25] A Deleuzian view would refuse this dualistic manner of articulating the similarities between them Their commonality is not simply at the level of sexual difference or 'maternal desire and instinct', but at the level of the actual capacities and speeds of their bodies and the connections they make (a theme which can be read through the fourth *Alien* film (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997), where the hybridization of Ripley's and the alien's DNA works to cancel the distinction between them altogether) They are similar throughout the series because of the actions they perform and what they do with their bodies. For example, early in the first film the alien is admired by Ash as a 'perfect organism' *because* it is not rigidly organized but can adapt to its surroundings and has an incredible ability to survive. In many ways Ripley displays those same qualities to outmanoeuvre and defeat the alien. Indeed, as Paula Graham has noted, in the final duel Ripley's movements resemble the movements of the alien itself.[26]

Ripley does indeed become monstrous, but this can be viewed as a creative process Brian Massumi uses the metaphor of monstrosity to conceptualize the breakdown of metaphysical oppositions which the process of 'becoming' produces Massumi then reads monstrosity as

23 Rosi Braidotti *Nomadic Subjects Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York Columbia University Press 1994) p 169

24 Paula Graham Looking lesbian amazons and aliens in science fiction cinema in B Budge and D Hammer (eds) *The Good the Bad and the Gorgeous Popular Culture s Romance with Lesbianism* (London Pandora 1994) p 202

25 Creed *The Monstrous Feminine*

26 Graham Looking lesbian p 202

27 Brian Massumi *A User s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge MA MIT Press 1992) pp 92–41

28 Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* p 52

a positive term to read the transformation of the human in a transgressive assemblage of forces which weakens the hierarchical nature of phallocentricism· in this instance the assemblages of woman with alien, woman with machines, and woman with action [27] What defines both Ripley as an action heroine and the alien is their 'monstrous' corporeality: a corporeality which confounds, disrupts and transgresses binaristic logic and opens a space for difference

Accompanying this new vision of corporeality is a philosophy of experimentation which creates *new ways of thinking* [28] In the remainder of this essay, I want to use the figure of Ripley to illustrate this dynamic mode of subjectivity and thinking by discussing how the new sign of the alien requires her to *think* and *act* differently in order to survive. In this respect I want to argue that Ripley can be a useful figuration for feminist theorists; just as Ripley's response to the new image of the alien requires a break in her habituated responses and heralds the need to develop a new, dynamic mode of operation in order to negotiate this change in her environment, the feminist theorist must also find new ways of negotiating the figure of the female-as-hero

Indeed, Ripley illustrates the point that the site of the unknown can also be the site of a transformational encounter – a potential moment of change – for she demonstrates that as your context changes so must your responses. This transformation into female hero occurs through changes in her thinking which necessarily affect the way in which she acts. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, knowledge has corporeal affects: it is immanent and embodied. In other words, there is no mind/body dualism but rather, thinking directly impacts on bodily actions. It is interesting to consider then, that when we are first introduced to Ripley in *Alien* she is depicted as a character who follows orders She constantly quotes from the manual and is the only character to observe the quarantine rules when Kane, a fellow crew member, becomes infected by the alien When Ripley suggests to Dallas that allowing Ash to keep the alien is 'hardly standard procedure', Dallas replies 'standard procedure is to do whatever the company tells you to do . I just run the ship'.

However, unlike Dallas, Ripley knows when to follow orders and when to think for herself.[29] When confronted with the new and uncoded figure of the alien, Ripley's decisions are not influenced by the manual There is a change in her environment and she can no longer rely on habituated responses but must pause to develop new strategies In other words, her responses are no longer automatic but require a new mode of thinking which is relevant to the issue at hand.

29 This is a theme which is carried on throughout the series For example a similar dynamic is repeated in the second film when Ripley overrides the commanding officer s authority after his routine military procedures fail to be effective in fighting the alien

This new mode of thinking and acting is most visible through her independent and creative uses of her environment in order to survive. For example, a scene in which the Captain, Dallas, is denied information from the ship's computer is contrasted to the scene later

in the film when Ripley, as the highest ranking surviving officer, defies standard procedure to override manually the computer's defence mechanism and gain access to the secret file on the alien Success depends on access to information available only through creative manipulation of the company's computer.

Once Ripley realizes that the company covertly sent the *Nostromo* to pick up the alien for use in its weapons division, and has deemed the crew 'expendable', she enacts a line of flight from the company's grid of control she undergoes a transformation. This transformation into action heroine means, of course, that she makes for herself a Body without Organs, for it requires a more creative, partial and pragmatic relationship between herself and the company This is not an arbitrary process; on the contrary, as Massumi points out, 'becoming is supremely pragmatic or it fails'.[30] Deleuze describes the cautious and pragmatic steps required for a successful undertaking of this process He writes.

30 Massumi *A User s Guide* p 100

> This is how it should be done: lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole 'diagram' as opposed to still signifying and subjective programs We are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us and at the place where we are; then descend from the strata. . . . You have constructed your own little machine ready when needed to be plugged into other collective machines.[31]

31 Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* p 161

These steps can be effectively mapped over Ripley's movements towards the end of the film. Ripley experiments with the opportunities for self-defence offered by the various resources in the escape pod, and thereby increases her capacity to survive by forming unanticipated linkages with other machines She 'reassembles' her body by covering and protecting it with a space suit and by using her technological expertise in an extremely inventive manner to thrust the alien through the airlock.

It is not simply that there is a change in Ripley's context, but rather it is her response to it which transforms her from a cog in the company structure and opens the possibility for her subjected body to become something quite different. Massumi articulates this changed relation between bodies-in-becoming and their context when he argues that·

the body-in-becoming does not simply react to a set of constraints. Instead it develops a new sensitivity to them, one subtle enough to convert them to opportunities – and to translate the body into an autonomous zone effectively enveloping infinite degrees of freedom.[32]

32 Massumi *A User s Guide* p 102

This new sensitivity to her environment bears directly on what Ripley's body can do, on its passions, speeds and movement. In Deleuzian terms, it bears on her capacity to affect and be affected: 'to destroy [another] body or be destroyed by it'.[33]

33 Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* p 257

From my perspective, Ripley offers valuable lessons for feminist theorists in the careful art of creative thinking, experimentation and transformation. Indeed, her ability to develop a new sensitivity to her environment offers a spectacular example of the methodological approach that I see as being extremely useful for feminist film theory. In other words, I see her actions as illustrating the 'delicate experimentations' and pragmatism which Deleuze argues are necessary to escape the limitations imposed by dualistic modes of thought.[34] The reflexivity she employs in relation to her surroundings is not only creatively important but also necessary for her survival Indeed, Ripley's final destination has proved to be as unpredictable as the rest of her character for, despite her death in *Alien3*, she has, of course, already been resurrected and is set to continue in at least one more installment in the series. This reflects the Deleuzian notion that becoming *does not have a destination or final location*, rather it is a ceaseless process where one continues to become. What is important is the process of change and the desire for the dynamism of becoming rather than the repetition of simply being.

34 Ibid p 152

It seems to me that a reflective engagement with our theoretical practices will enable feminist film theorists to examine the usefulness of at least some of our modes of understanding and to question the basis for their continued investment. From this perspective, feminist film theory will continue to transform itself rather than risk becoming 'petrified into dogma'.[35] The crucial questions which confront feminists who are interested in the changing representations of women in the cinema are: which theories open up new ways of thinking and enhance our becoming, and which theories close off experimentation and confine us to the repetition of being? From this basis I would argue that it is a matter of political urgency that as feminist theorists we reconceptualize the way we think about images of active and aggressive woman. Action heroines, such as Ripley, are transgressive and transformative characters who *can* be conceived outside the negative terms of gender binaries and can be read as alternative images of female subjectivity We can claim that these female characters are masculine or 'figuratively male', but from my perspective it is much more productive to conceptualize them as transformative, transgressive and alternative *women*. In this respect I

35 Laleen Jayamanne cited in A Blonski B Creed and F Freiberg *Don t Shoot Darling! Women s Independent Filmmaking in Australia* (Richmond Greenhouse Publications 1987) p 380

would argue that just as Ripley must alter her way of thinking and acting if she is successfully to negotiate the figure of the alien, so too the feminist theorist must transform some of her habitual responses on how to read the 'active woman' when confronted with the image of the action heroine. Like Ripley we have to invent a set of strategies or theories that are not only specific to the ongoing changes in our contexts, but which will 'call into being new, alternative ways of constructing the female subject'[36] This new mode of appreciating heroic female characters such as Ripley might then resonate with the feminist desire for personal and social change, and enable us to transform how we conceptualize and experience female subjectivity in the cinema and other cultural sites

36 Braidotti Nomadic Subjects p 208

Excusing the violence of Hollywood women: music in *Nikita* and *Point of No Return*

PAULINE MAcRORY

One of the most significant recent developments in the representation of women in Hollywood film has been the rise of the action heroine. Yvonne Tasker states that 'it would be possible to see the centrality of action heroines in recent Hollywood film as posing a challenge to women's social role, and to her representation within the cinema's symbolic order'.[1]

The action heroine has been seen by many as transgressing the traditional binary gender codes that equate activity with masculinity and passivity with femininity. Jeffrey Brown's fascinating article on *Point of No Return*, the American remake of the French film *Nikita*, cites it as a prime example of a film which problematizes the binary codes of gender. He argues that while action heroines like Sigourney Weaver and Linda Hamilton demonstrate that gender is a performative category through their appropriation of masculine iconography such as guns and the muscle shirt, *Point of No Return* takes this one step further by focusing on a woman, Maggie (Bridget Fonda), who is symbolically male but disguised as a female. Taking on Butler's notion of drag artists showing the constructed nature of gender, Brown describes the modern action heroine as taking drag one step further by 'repositioning destabilizing gender performances onto feminine bodies that are not easily read as humorous or sexually perverse'[2] He argues that 'in effect the heroine of *Point of No Return* can be seen as a biological female who enacts femininity as a disguise for her symbolically masculine role. she is a double

3 Ibid p 54

4 Martin Shingler Masquerade or
   drag? Bette Davis and the
   ambiguities of gender Screen
   vol 36 no 3 (1995)

cross-dresser'[3] This evokes Martin Shingler's discussion of the
masculine qualities of Bette Davis[4] Expanding on Joan Riviere's
concept of femininity as a masquerade, Shingler argues that this
excessive show of femininity by women who possess masculine traits
is not necessarily an unconscious defence against male retribution for
their appropriation of the phallus, as Riviere argues Instead, Shingler
posits that this show of femininity can be a fully conscious
manipulation of the passive and helpless image of women in order to
achieve covertly what may not be possible overtly in their inferior
social position These two films play upon this covert power that
women possess.

However, Brown's claim that *Point of No Return* blurs the binary
gender codes common to film is problematic At the start of his
discussion he stipulates that *Point of No Return* is so like *Nikita*, the
French original of three years earlier, that it is only necessary to talk
about one of them, and he chooses the US version, but in fact the
French version is much better suited to his argument. The
progressive nature of Maggie in *Point of No Return* derives from her
close relation to Nikita, her French counterpart, and in fact the film
goes some way towards trying to account for and excuse the
violence that comes with the character. Nikita's unqualified violence
rests upon her being presented as a child, and the film maps her
growth to maturity. The progression of Maggie, however, is from a
qualified masculinity to a femininity; the creation of her feminine
persona eventually leads to her real feminization and through this to
her rejection of violence. As Holmlund points out, 'Hollywood and
its audiences are both fascinated by yet uncomfortable with violent

5 Chris Holmlund Cruisin for a
   bruisin Hollywood s deadly
   (lesbian) dolls Cinema Journal
   vol 34 no 1 (1994) p 32

women.'[5] In order to make the character acceptable for a mainstream
Hollywood film, her violence needs to be explained, excused, and
eventually rejected.

Because the narratives of the two different versions of the film
remain very close, other elements of the film have to account for the
differences in portrayal of the central female character These
differences can be seen most clearly in the musical scores The
music in a film deeply affects the way we perceive and understand
what we witness on screen. In doing so it draws on a vast array of
musical codes which convey particular meanings in a form of
shorthand. As Kathryn Kalinak says, 'an examination of scoring
practices in Hollywood films reveals an intricate musical language
used to characterise time and place, to flesh out thematic

6 Kathryn Kalinak The fallen
   woman and the virtuous wife
   musical stereotypes in The
   Informer Gone With the Wind
   and Laura Film Reader no 5
   (1982) p 76

7 Claudia Gorbman Unheard
   Melodies (London BFI Publishing
   1987) p 13

implications, and to portray character'.[6] Claudia Gorbman argues
that film music can be understood as containing three types of
musical codes· purely musical, referring to musical structure itself,
cultural, in relation to the context of its production; and cinematic,
relating to elements within the film.[7] A code can be something as
simple as major keys in western music denoting happiness, and
minor keys denoting sadness. Films themselves create their own

8 Simon Frith Mood music an enquiry into narrative film music *Screen* vol 25 no 3 (1984) p 84

9 Kalinak The fallen woman p 76

musical codes Simon Frith points out how 'the music for *Zorba the Greek* became so powerfully connotative of "Greece" that Greek restaurants (even those in Greece itself) have to use the music to convince customers of their "Greekness" '.[8] Kalinak's analysis of three classic Hollywood films shows that 'certain types of instrumentation, melody, harmony, and rhythm came to denote certain types of women. These musical stereotypes helped to determine the audience response to and evaluation of female characters, and like signposts, directed the audience toward the "correct" estimation of a woman's character.'[9] Film composers, then, can draw on these widely understood musical codes in order to infuse the film with certain meanings. An example of this in the films under discussion here is that they both open with rock guitar, a sound that brings with it cultural associations with masculinity, to inform our impression of the lead female character.

Gorbman's third type of code refers to the way in which the musical score will then take on extra meanings specific to the film itself. The score for *Point of No Return,* for example, demonstrates Maggie's acquisition of culture by using a theme with classical musical structures; but this theme also takes on specifically filmic connotations, coming to signify Maggie's feeling of freedom.

It becomes obvious, then, that an understanding of the score can lend much insight to the analysis of any film. But the particular significance here is that the two films under discussion are so very similar in terms of narrative. *Point of No Return* relies on other filmic elements to modify and excuse the violence that Nikita has bequeathed to Maggie, but the music is a principle strategy employed to this end, and an analysis of the score provides an entirely different reading of the film.

Nikita (Luc Besson, 1990; music by Eric Serra) opens with the eponymous heroine (Anne Parillaud) and three male companions going to raid a pharmacy for drugs Her companions are shot by the police, and she herself shoots and kills a policeman. She is sentenced to life imprisonment, but the Secret Service fakes her suicide by forcibly injecting her with a supposed overdose, and offers her, in the shape of Bob (Tcheky Karyo), one last chance of life if she agrees to train as a government assassin Nikita attacks Bob and takes him prisoner in an attempt to escape, but when this fails she agrees to his proposition Her training involves learning to fight, shoot, use a computer and, most importantly, being taught by Amande (Jeanne Moreau) how to dress and act in a cultured 'feminine' way At first she accepts the training regime, but when Bob refuses her request to take a walk outside the compound as a birthday treat, she becomes destructive and impossible to train Bob brings her a cake to celebrate her birthday, and tells her that she will

be killed unless she improves immediately, making Nikita finally accept the impossibility of escape from her situation.

When we next see her, after a gap of several years, she is a polished and sophisticated woman about to leave the compound for the first time on a dinner date with Bob. The dinner turns out to be her first assassination, and Bob instructs her on how to kill her target and gives her a detailed escape route The route, however, is bricked up, and Nikita has to fight her way out of the restaurant After successfully completing the test she is allowed to leave the training compound and build a new life under a new name. She meets Marco and becomes engaged to him. Her first assignment on the outside is to masquerade as a waitress and take a primed bomb to a hotel room. This goes well, and when Bob rings to congratulate her she invites him over for dinner, telling Marco that he is her uncle. Bob gives them tickets to Venice as an engagement present, but this turns out to be the setting for another hit, and Nikita has to shoot the target from her bathroom window, as Marco talks to her through the door She is furious with Bob, but he wins her over by offering her her own operation, tracking a traitor When this goes disastrously wrong, Victor the Cleaner (Jean Reno) is sent to take over the job Victor uses acid to burn off the face of one of their victims, but when it becomes apparent that the victim is still alive, Nikita's male partner becomes hysterical and Victor shoots him. He then forces Nikita to disguise herself as the victim and carry the operation through to the end, killing anyone that gets in their way This wanton violence shocks Nikita into the realization that she can no longer work for the Service, and she takes an emotional leave of Marco, who then covers for her in a final meeting with Bob

Point of No Return (John Badham, 1993; UK title *The Assassin*, music by Hans Zimmer) casts Bridget Fonda as the lead character, now called Maggie, with Gabriel Byrne as Bob, Anne Bancroft as Amanda and Dermot Mulroney as the boyfriend, now called J.P. It follows the plot of *Nikita* unusually closely, but with one major difference. when the final job goes wrong, Victor the Cleaner (Harvey Keitel) is instructed to kill Maggie once the job is finished and she has to fight him for her life. This is a crucial point, as I will explain later.

During the opening credits of each film, there is a protracted scene of Nikita/Maggie with three male companions, walking through the city at night. Both films show the four junkies dressed in old jeans and leather jackets, looking dishevelled and accompanied by non-diegetic rock music, a signifier of masculinity. *Point of No Return* also includes a female voice at this point, which comes to signify Maggie's inner nature at various stages in the film. A further reference to her femininity is demonstrated in that, unlike in *Nikita*,

the shots of the junkies walking are intercut with closeups of their faces, which pick out the delicate Bridget Fonda as a woman from the outset. In *Nikita* we do not know for sure that she is a woman until she speaks outside the shop.

Throughout the opening minutes of the film Nikita is constructed as a child She has no self control. We see this most clearly at the scene of her 'suicide' as she snivels uninhibitedly and cries for her mother The appeal is simple and childlike – 'My mother will come and get me' – a blind faith in a parent's ability to make everything all right In *Point of No Return,* however, this appeal for her mother is transformed into an attempt to explain her violence by giving us a reason for it, that her mother cares about her so little that she did not even make the effort to be with her at her 'execution'.[10]

10 This difference in meaning is of course made possible by the existence of the death penalty in the USA In the French film Nikita's mother would not be present during this scene because Nikita s *suicide* is being faked rather than her execution

Throughout the film Nikita seems not to take her new life seriously. Like a child, she has no concept of the consequence of her actions. She sees her training as a game, which she decides she will no longer play when Bob forbids her to go outside the compound It is not until she is forced to accept the reality of her situation by Bob's ultimatum that she begins to treat it seriously, and then only to save her own life. Bombing the hotel is a new experience, and her singing and dancing afterwards demonstrates her exuberance that it was so easy and her lack of remorse or responsibility for what she has done. Her relationship with Marco seems almost to be that of a child with a parent, with her total lack of inhibition and his indulgence towards her. Nikita's childlike nature continues right up until the acid scene, in which she reacts to the shock by adopting the foetal position and screaming for it to stop But now she has to face the unpleasant consequences of her actions, and Victor forces her to complete the mission This rude awakening into reality leads to her eventual rejection of violence and determination to stop Victor killing anyone else, her forlorn 'I can't take any more of this' demonstrating that this time the lesson has sunk in. It is an enlightened and more mature Nikita that takes leave of Marco in order to start a new life.

It is pertinent – in view of Tasker's assertion that action heroes and heroines cannot be in control of an adult sexuality[11] – that she ends her relationship with Marco at this sudden transition into adulthood, and certainly their final scene together is their most equal. But the split serves more to reinforce our knowledge of her maturity, her acceptance that she cannot have everything she wants In order to start a new life she must leave Marco behind, and her unhappiness at this decision, demonstrated not only through the visual image but through the yearning minor music, reinforces our knowledge of the new maturity and strength which she requires to go through with her course of action Nikita has finally grown up

11 Tasker *Spectacular Bodies* p 138

By contrast, in *Point of No Return* Maggie's development is definitely from masculinity into femininity, rather than from childhood to adulthood As she adopts the clothes, the cosmetics, the

mannerisms of a 'woman', she also begins to think as one, rejecting her masculine violence and the male skills she has learned. There are many clues to her femininity when compared to the French film. The clothes that the two women wear are a prime example. After Maggie's training is over we almost always see her in feminine dresses and skirts, except in the supermarket scene where her clothing is explained by the fact that she is redecorating her flat. This is in contrast to Nikita, who is often seen in trousers. Nikita wears her most interesting outfit when she goes to see Bob after the Venice trip. She is angry with him, and demonstrates this by parodying the conventions of femininity in which she is supposedly masquerading through her outlandish hat, made more apparent by the disparaging expression of the (female) onlooker at the next table. *Point of No Return*, however, includes no such parody.

Another difference is that Nikita is partnered for the final job with a man, while in *Point of No Return* Maggie's partner is female. At this point showing Maggie to be stronger than a male partner would undermine her new status as a woman, albeit as a strong one. In addition, Maggie is required to disguise herself as a woman, not a man, to complete the job. Nikita's capacity to carry off a successful impression of a man in order to complete her assignment demonstrates that the blurring of gender boundaries in the French film continues to the end. In *Point of No Return* Maggie's feminization is too explicit for her to be able to carry off the same disguise.

But perhaps the most telling aspect of Maggie's feminization is her objectification by the men and even the women in the film. Amande(a) (in both films played by iconic stars – Moreau and Bancroft), explains conspiratorially to Nikita that 'there are two things which have no limit: femininity, and the means of taking advantage of it', and therefore infers its status as a masquerade, yet in *Point of No Return* Amanda seems determined to turn Maggie into the societal concept of a proper woman by finding her 'feminine streak'. Moreau's Amande explains to Nikita that in order to look and act like a woman she must be guided by her own pleasure as a woman. But Bancroft's Amanda teaches Maggie how to present herself for the pleasure of others: to smile, to eat correctly, to dress in an acceptable manner; she is constructed as an object to be looked at. Even J.P., supposedly her ally, continues this construction through his endless photographs of her. J P. also desperately wants to know about Maggie's past, and swallows whole Bob's fairytale description of her childhood. He is constructing an ideal Maggie, and part of his ideal would seem to be turning her into an object of the male gaze.

Maggie's relationship with Byrne's Bob is more interesting. His construction and objectification of her is expressed through music. The first time he sees her as a female object of desire coincides with the Nina Simone song, the explicitly sexual 'I Want Some Sugar In

My Bowl', which Maggie is playing loudly in her room. It is to the accompaniment of this conventionally 'sexy' slow jazz that he first notices her attractions as she lies alluringly half-dressed on the bed, and he stutters distractedly. Her curvaceous appearance here can be contrasted to that of Nikita, who looks scrawny in her underwear, around whom Karyo's Bob remains supremely controlled until their eventual kiss In *Point of No Return*, Bob's final request to take the Nina Simone album which Maggie has left behind in the flat further emphasizes his objectification of her through the music. Even after she is gone J.P. can own his construction of her through his photos, and Bob through her music.

The non-diegetic music also contributes to Maggie's construction through its references to culture. Both films lay a good deal of emphasis on the acquisition of culture to control and hide the true nature of their heroines In *Nikita* culture is represented in the music through the semi-diegetic Mozart, which she first uses to mock their attempts to 'culturize' her by dancing to in a parody of ballet, and then appropriates in order to support the persona she is portraying, playing it quietly during the dinner party in her flat. The use of the light Baroque-style music over the following scene in Venice, however, returns to the parody of culture, as she plays at being sophisticated before reverting to her natural self. The rest of the non-diegetic music in *Nikita* remains pop-based, relying entirely on beat and synthesizers. This more popular sound serves to emphasize the parodic nature of the high culture sounds.

The score to *Point of No Return*, however, incorporates these classical sounds into its structure Figure 1 shows the 'culture' theme which represents the culturization and construction of Maggie as a woman, in particular by Bob, and her ownership by the people who

Fig 1

have created this new version of her. It is a smooth theme in a minor key, with long sustained notes and an overall falling pattern, giving it a sad and wistful feel It appears for the first time as she begins to see her training as something from which she cannot escape It is particularly notable when she finally gives in to Bob's ultimatum, and asks Amanda to help transform her into the new person that she needs to become in order to stay alive. From then on it appears at key scenes to demonstrate her lack of personal freedom and her ownership by the Service, and Bob in particular (for example, as they sit in the restaurant before her first job, and as she leaves the training compound) When it appears at the end of the bathroom assassination scene, and again as Bob refuses to help her

get out of the Service, it is emphasizing her inability to escape her situation It also underscores Bob's attempts to (re)construct her, playing under his unrealistic description of her childhood to J.P. at the dinner party, and as he picks up the Nina Simone album – the sign of Maggie's sexual objectification – at the end of the film. It also, interestingly, underscores his report to his boss that Maggie is dead Even now he is constructing her as something she is not, and we are reminded that his control over her still exists, that she is only free because he chose to let her go.

The smooth, simple rhythm of the culture theme contrasts with the dotted, syncopated rhythm of 'Maggie's theme' (figure 2), which signifies her actual character. We hear this for the first time in a slow solo line – giving it a sad quality in conjunction with the minor key – as she is left to think over Bob's proposition of employment.

Fig 2

A faster, livelier version of this theme, complete with pop beat, underscores her training montage. Here it shows that she is not yet taking the training seriously or allowing herself to be changed. This use of Maggie's theme gives its next appearance a greater significance: it plays as Bob gives Maggie the birthday cake, but at his ultimatum it falters and then gives way to the culture theme This musical transition clearly underlines her decision to submit to the Service. From this point on Maggie's theme appears only rarely, at moments when the culture mask slips, for example her honest delight at receiving a birthday present from Bob. The Nina Simone songs take its place in representing her connection with her past self – she tells J P. that they remind her of her mother – but Nina Simone now has another meaning, signifying her objectification by Bob, who has even given her 'Nina' as a codename Maggie's own character, then, is almost completely submerged under her constructed personality. But Maggie's theme reappears when J.P. tells Bob she has gone at the end of the film. Its reiteration here signifies her eventual escape and return to herself.

It would seem at this point that she has rejected everything she has been taught, even returning to her original masculine clothes But the appearance of rejection is undermined by the music As we see Maggie walking away we hear the theme shown in figure 3 It is a

Fig 3

triumphant major theme, with the melodic line remaining firmly based around the triad notes of each chord and thereby strengthening the major key. This is the 'freedom' theme, having originally appeared at Maggie's first trip out of the compound, and its appearance here at the end of the film signifies her real freedom from the constraints placed upon her, not only by Bob and the Service, but also by J P But the freedom theme also has a Baroque sound, with the descending octaves, fugal movement and harpsichord of its accompaniment. This high cultured sound, then, along with the theme's associations with the reconstructed Maggie who left the compound, indicates that she has been irrevocably altered by her experiences.

Music also plays a large part in the audience perception of the violent acts which are integral to these films Both films clearly separate the violence that the characters perform of their own volition from that which they are instructed to do. In *Nikita* the eponymous heroine's early violence (the murder of the policeman, the stabbing and the fight in the courtroom) is either totally free from music or underscored with odd synthesizer sounds. But the restaurant mission and the bathroom scene are underscored with a regular percussive beat and, in the latter case, a military snare The restaurant mission music begins with minor synthesizer chords as Bob leaves Nikita alone to perform the assassination, but the sadness the minor chords signify is connected to her disappointment in having her happy evening and trust in Bob destroyed The music becomes a drum beat when she snaps out of her disappointment and prepares for the shooting. This military sound is identifying her as a soldier, and thereby reducing her culpability for the killings that are about to happen. The other musical episodes related to violence lend an unusual insight into her feelings. As she prepares for the hotel bombing assignment, going to the bar and then the hotel basement as per instructions, there is a fast, light syncopated beat in contrast with the slower, more deliberate beat for the other two assassination scenes. The quick pulse, in common with standard action music, prepares us for action and generates excitement. Its disparity with the other two assassination scenes seems to demonstrate that the music is expressing the character's nervous anticipation for her first proper assignment, rather than pointing out that she is following orders. This is not typical of action scenes, which tend to focus on the spectacle, rather than the character's feelings But then the team sit down to wait for their opportunity and the music stops. When the phone eventually rings, which is obviously after some time, Nikita performs the minimal task of taking the order with the primed bomb upstairs without any musical accompaniment, and the feeling is one of strong anticlimax. The lack of musical beat demonstrates the lack of excitement in the eventual task

The other important episode is that of the surveillance of the

ambassador prior to the final operation. Marco comes home celebrating leaving his job at the supermarket in order to go into business building boats. The scene is accompanied by a light major theme with a slowish beat, giving it a relaxed feel, which continues over the change to her surveillance operation and throughout the whole montage The overpowering impression is that the music is paralleling her career advancement – getting her own operation – to Marco's This is consistent with the rest of the film, as Nikita's status as an assassin is treated throughout as just a job, the same as any other Her work colleagues are shown to be normal people just doing their jobs and sometimes making mistakes. The friendly ease which exists between Nikita and Amande, among the team for the final job, and even to some extent between Nikita and Bob, demonstrates the normality of this life to her and her happiness within it She is delighted at the success and ease of the hotel bombing, and Bob wins her over after Venice by offering her a career opportunity, her own operation. While her ignorance of the consequences of her work is part of her childlike character, it is also a necessary component of the characters of all the people we see. They simply think about their work as a job which they take pride in doing well. In this context Nikita's determination to finish the final mission even after it has gone wrong can be seen as professional pride. She wants her first operation to be a success.

Maggie's attitude towards violence in *Point of No Return* is completely different. True to Hollywood conceptions of violent women her violence has to be accounted for. This is the pertinence of the absence of her mother from her 'execution', and in particular from her 'funeral', despite Maggie's desperate pleading for her. The film thereby infers that Maggie is rebellious and violent because of a bad relationship with her mother. Even at this early stage of the film, then, where she is supposed to be wantonly violent, excuses are being made When she kills the policeman it is significant that although she puts the gun to his head, she does not pull the trigger until the policeman has made a move towards his own gun, so that the killing can be given a slightly defensive air. In the scene that follows where she stabs the senior officer through the hand, we see grainy shots from her perspective, emphasizing that she is under the influence of drugs and so not responsible for her actions. Both films make the stabbing more acceptable by showing the officer first hitting the heroine hard enough to knock her off her chair, but this is helped along in the Hollywood version by the slight synthesizer emphasis in the soundtrack on both acts, which helps to mirror the two acts by treating them as the same. Maggie's fight in the courtroom is also helped by the presence of 'action' music – fast beat, repetitive rhythms, and a continuing movement with no emphasis on any of the actual violent acts. As mentioned earlier, it is standard for action movies to treat violence and action as spectacle

Leitch explains how audiences can disavow the violence that they see on screen by being insulated against the consequences, making fight scenes exciting rather than disturbing. The music contributes to the ignorance of consequence by keeping an overall sense of pace and energy, and not emphasizing individual acts of violence. In this particular fight scene the underscore binds the whole scene together and presents it to the audience as an exciting spectacle, not giving us the opportunity to consider the feelings of or consequences for the people involved In this way, Maggie's violence is not given a negative slant. 'Violence is ... justified if it doesn't hurt its victims.'[12]

12 Thomas M Leitch Nobody here but us killers the disavowal of violence in recent American films , *Film and Philosophy* vol 1 (1994) p 74

These qualifications continue in the portrayal of Maggie's early attempt to escape by kidnapping Bob after he has offered her the chance to work for the Service. In *Nikita,* Karyo's Bob is softly-spoken, almost sympathetic to her plight, and Nikita's violence is emphasized by her destruction of the furniture and kicking Bob unnecessarily while he lies injured on the floor The music that accompanies Nikita's dash for the exit is a light, upbeat major theme, detracting from the seriousness and urgency of the scene, which only becomes minor and darker-sounding when it is apparent that her plan will not work. In *Point of No Return*, by contrast, Bob is cruel to Maggie, snarling at her to 'do something to help [her] country for a change' and responding to her plea for time to think with: 'Yeah, why don't you think about it Maggie? You've got one hour!' Maggie's violence against him, then, is seen as justifiable revenge for the way he treated her when she was confused and frightened, and her dash for the exit is accompanied by fast minor music, a darker sound than in the French film. The more serious nature of the music in the Hollywood film emphasizes Maggie's desperation

In *Point of No Return* Bob's nastiness is mirrored throughout the portrayal of almost every member of the government force. The other team members in her first job in the hotel clearly show impatience with, and contempt for, their inexperienced assassin. Keitel's Victor cold-bloodedly shoots her friend and team member for getting hysterical during the horrific acid incident. His own reaction to the realization that the victim is still alive when he pours acid onto her face, is a shrug of the shoulders and a casual 'she's not dead' (as opposed to Reno's shocked exclamation and involuntary jump away in *Nikita*) Maggie's boss plans to have her killed and Victor attempts to carry this out. Bob continually betrays her trust with ulterior motives. Even Amanda betrays her by telling Bob of her visit This unequivocally black picture of Maggie's colleagues makes her final rejection of them unproblematic, and makes her own violent actions less reprehensible by showing a much worse alternative

Maggie's own attitude to violence deteriorates immediately after

her transformation into 'femininity'. When she sees the hotel
destroyed by the bomb she has planted she reacts with horror The
music emphasizes her feelings. As she moves out to her car in the
hotel car park the freedom theme is playing. Here it is signifying her
freedom from apprehension now that she has completed her first
assignment without unpleasantness But it is abruptly wiped out with
the noise of the explosion. After this there is a dramatic minor
upward run of strings, underscoring Maggie's horrified reaction
When Bob arrives on the scene and asks her how she is, she
responds with 'I just blew up a hotel. How the hell do you think I
am?', putting into words the horror and anger which the music has
already implied.

After the next assassination – the bathroom shooting – Maggie
tells Bob that she wants to leave the Service The feminization that
we have witnessed through her changing appearance and changing
attitude to violence is made explicit here as she pleads, 'I know you
like that you made me into something different. But you're not
looking close enough. I AM different.' Bob only overturns her
refusal to undertake the next assignment when he promises to help
her get out of the Service if she completes one last job. When this
goes wrong, Maggie's desperation to finish the job is accounted for
by her commendable desire to leave the Service

However, the most important contribution that the music makes to
excusing Maggie's violence is where she is killing under strict
orders: the restaurant scene and the bathroom scene In *Nikita* these
two scenes are underscored by a regular slow beat and snare, giving
them a military feel. Nikita is portrayed by the music as a killing
machine with no emotion. In *Point of No Return* these assassinations
are underscored by the theme shown in figure 4, which I have called
the 'nightmare' theme. This music symbolizes Maggie's obedience in

Fig 4

acting on the instructions of the people who own her, the Service.
But the interest lies in its structure. The underlying triplets give the
music a cyclical feel and a problematic rhythmic base which is
difficult to break down. This is exacerbated in the introduction to the
theme by the supporting strings playing every second triplet beat,
which makes the rhythm very difficult to determine. The cyclical
feel, the lack of movement, is added to by the static melodic line
which moves from the fifth note up or down a semitone and then
back, with the length of the notes becoming shorter through each
phrase The music modulates up by tones and semitones at irregular
intervals. The combined effect of these musical strategies is to give

the theme a nightmarish feel, a sense of being trapped and unable to move, with the overall harmonic rising only contributing to the escalation of tension because we expect it to rise to a climax The nightmare builds when the music slows to half speed, the musical equivalent of slow motion, negating any movement to an even greater extent. This musical feeling emulates exactly what Maggie is supposed to be experiencing, a feeling of being trapped and unable to escape.

In both these scenes the music and the images work together very effectively. In the restaurant the theme begins as Maggie prepares for the shooting. At this point the image is also slowed down, adding to the feeling of unreality and nightmare. The beat enters as Maggie walks towards the target, giving the music a heavier texture. The theme stops and the music slows to arpeggios as we see the target group, and then returns slightly faster than before as the camera switches back to Maggie. The *ritardando* to half speed coincides with the raising of her gun, and the half-speed music starts at the shots, as the nightmare is intensifying. The theme continues as she tries to escape, and comes to a halt as she sees the bricked-up window. From this point on she is no longer under instructions and must fall back on her own resources in order to escape with her life. It is important that this is not characterized in the music by Maggie's own theme, indicating that even though she is no longer acting under instructions she is still a trained product of the Service Instead, her need to use her own resources to escape is characterized by the female voice and the rock guitar that appeared at the opening of the film. The rest of her escape is accompanied by typical 'action' music – fast beat, percussion, synthesizers and plenty of dissonance, and the occasional fast moving string line – again placing the emphasis on the action of the scene, her fight to escape, and not on the violence that enables her to do so.

The second use of the nightmare theme is during the bathroom scene. Here its connection with the images is even more notable. The frequent cuts away from Maggie demonstrate that the theme is directly linked to her, because we only hear it when she is visible on the screen. The music starts as she enters the bathroom, signifying the start of the mission. It continues through the gun assembly, and only falters at J.P's untimely insistence on a conversation. The triplet movement continues quickly and lightly as she tries to focus on the target, but at J P.'s proposal of marriage it stops and the music slows, continuing slowly and melodically as he pleads with her. The lack of the nightmare theme indicates that her attention is no longer on the job When J P. leaves to answer the door the theme re-starts, stopping at the cuts to J.P. As the music rises and the tension builds, the cutting between shots becomes faster, often coinciding with the musical beats to give the scene a choreographed quality, fitting in with the cyclical triplets and adding to the feeling

of inevitability. The theme climaxes as Maggie shoots, and immediately stops as the door opens, changing to a slow minor to underscore the following confrontation between J.P. and Maggie

This association of the theme with the shots of Maggie lends credence to the trapped feeling it creates. The music is so closely associated with Maggie that we know it is describing her feelings The feeling of unreality created in each scene, first through the slow motion and secondly through the correspondence of cuts to beats, intensifies the nightmarish quality of the music. The theme makes one final appearance, towards the end of the film as Victor grabs Maggie's throat and tries to throttle her. Here it recalls not only the strict obedience to the rules which she showed in her own assassinations, and which Victor is now demonstrating even though he is close to death, but also intensifies her feeling of literal entrapment. Its obvious demonstration of her feeling of entrapment by the Service and her unwillingness to carry out their instructions makes this theme one of the most telling and emotive aspects of Maggie's rejection of violence.

These two films, then, demonstrate an entirely different attitude towards their central character. *Nikita* provides us with a female character who hides a violent, 'masculine' nature behind a self-consciously 'feminine' exterior. At the same time her childlike portrayal works to desexualize her, throwing into sharp relief the performative nature of her femininity. In this film the gender categories are blurred, and Nikita's true nature is separated from her image, which we clearly see as a masquerade.

Point of No Return, however, seems unable to retain this ambivalence about gender. Maggie is always portrayed according to standard gender codes, moving from masculine to feminine throughout the film. The film therefore firmly reinscribes the gender boundaries that were transgressed in *Nikita*. Maggie's transformation from masculinity to femininity and her rejection of violence are inextricably linked, reinforcing the gender stereotypes that equate femininity with passivity. This is an explicit example of the Hollywood inability to cope with female violence; but more importantly, Maggie is unable to maintain a masquerade of femininity without being transformed into what she is enacting. *Point of No Return,* then, collapses the distance between its female character's exterior and her interior, between her essence and her image, so that the performative nature of gender so clearly seen in *Nikita* is denied I have demonstrated in this article how music is a principle contributor to the difference in portrayal of these two female characters The music attempts to remove the focus from Maggie's violence, either by detracting attention from it, as in her escape from the restaurant, or by underlining her dislike of it, as in

the use of the emotive nightmare theme. Maggie is seen as a desperate and unhappy character, and the music helps us to identify and sympathize with her. Through a comparison of the treatment of the lead characters by the scores for *Nikita* and *Point of No Return*, we can clearly see how music can affect our perceptions of a film. For while it is true that the narrative of the US remake cleaves closely to the original film, the music certainly does not.

And what might our children become? Future visions, governance and the child television audience in postwar Britain

DAVID OSWELL

Domestic geographies and future visions

In 1950 Monica Dickens, niece of the Victorian novelist Charles
Dickens, wrote an article entitled 'Television – not for me!' for her
regular column in *Woman's Own*. Although the title of the article
clearly indicates the author's antipathy to this newly popular
technology, its tone is more speculative. It is speculative in that its
statements concern what might be, rather than what is, but more
importantly her writing suggests that television, as a social
technology, is never merely given. Moreover, Dickens's article is not
simply prescient in that the fears she expresses about television still
resonate in contemporary debates, but rather her article acts as a
diagram for understanding the complex figuring of the
child/television couplet of postwar Britain.

In the opening paragraphs of the piece, Dickens provides an image
of Sweden as clean, well-ordered and without television The image
of rows of suburban homes, smoke breathing from their chimneys
and each housing families content with their old-fashioned pastimes,
is one, Dickens argues, that could also represent a Britain of the
present, as it had in a Britain of time past But such a possibility,
she continues, is dependent on a fundamental decision: television or
not television If the wrong choice is made, we (the readers, the

'British', the women who maintain the home and family) might tread the same path as the USA Dickens takes the reader on a journey from Sweden to the USA·

> If you go into the most sordid slums of Chicago, seek out a tumbledown tenement building in a filthy alley, climb over the garbage pails to the top flat where poverty, drunkenness and squalor reign, you will find a frig and a television set.[1]

The story she tells of the journey into this exemplary home is a fable. It is a moral tale. The refrigerator and the television set are seen as symptomatic of urban deprivation and depravation. They are seen as signs of excessive ill-afforded spending which are viewed as being mistaken for 'the essentials of life' She describes television as being 'like an imperious queen' which 'claims your undivided attention' and whose effects would be all too apparent.

> If they ever start having TV programmes all day long we might become a nation, not of housewives, but of sluts! I don't say we would, but we might.[2]

The task of the housewife (and also, as we shall see, the mother) was to hold on to to the past and to protect the nation. A geography of the future of television was mapped onto the architectural space of the home and onto the cultural differentiation of nations Constructions of time and cultural geography layer each other as the sediments within which television is buried.

At the end of 1947 only 34,000 television sets were in use in Britain. Only 0 2% of families had sets in their homes. In 1948 the figure had risen to 134,000. In 1955 40% of the population had a television and by 1963 the figure had risen to 89%. The television set was a signifier of modernity, and its ownership signified not just status among friends and relatives, but also the presence of the 'modern home' [3] Although the design of the television set changed rapidly from the early bulky wood and bakelite small-screened models of the 1940s and 1950s to the sleek streamlined metallic designs of the late 1950s and 1960s, its insertion into the home during that time signalled a wider set of changes. For example, its location within the home displaced the centrality of the hearth, which has such a revered place in the history and formation of 'Englishness'. The hearth signified 'the exquisite comfort of our English homes'.[4] An article on 'Fireplaces and fireplacing' in *Ideal Home* in 1949 declared:

> To-day, when we introduce such benefits of scientific discovery as television into our sitting-rooms, we find ourselves faced with the problem of resolving a new duality of interest· the fireplace and the television set[5]

1 Monica Dickens Television – not for me' *Woman s Own* 27 July 1950

2 Ibid

3 Tim O Sullivan Television memories and cultures of viewing in John Corner (ed) *Popular Television in Britain* (London British Film Institute 1991)

4 Augustus Mayhew 1858 cited in Leonora Davidoff et al Landscape with figures home and community in English society in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth Penguin 1976) p 153

5 *Ideal Home* October 1949 p 37 The displacement of the hearth by the television set was in part dependent on the introduction at a popular level of central heating

Instead of the warm glow of the flaming fire in the family's faces, there was now the steely grey flicker of the television's radiation Its introduction into the home gave rise to a new set of domestic designs for television viewing.

> Most of the day your set will sit lifeless in the room, so its looks are important As the cabinet is bulky and creates special problems of accommodation, its position shouldn't be obtrusive. Your room must be re-arranged for its new function.[6]

6 *House and Garden* Spring 1949

Although mass-market magazines, such as *Woman* and *Woman's Own*, did increasingly in the 1950s figure images of television sets in articles on design, the concern about television set design and the design of the living room for television viewing was mainly limited to magazines such as *Ideal Home* and *House and Garden*, which had a predominantly middle- and upper-class readership[7] For example, in spring 1949 both *House and Garden* and *Ideal Home* carried articles on the place of television within the home. 'Make room for television' gave the prices for television sets, licence fees and fixed lenses (to enlarge the picture on small screens).[8] It showed different ways of placing the television set in different types of living room. In an article entitled 'Decision on television', the discussion was rather more technical and referred to cathode-ray tubes and aerials[9] But both articles stressed that television need not be watched in a darkened room, and laid out the spatial arrangement of viewers in the room:

7 For a wider discussion of television set design see Deborah Chambers Design and designers a sociological study of the processes and meaning of product styling (University of Kent PhD thesis, 1984)

8 *House and Garden* Spring 1949

9 *Ideal Home* May 1949

> Low chairs are needed, four to twelve feet away. You need not sit in complete darkness when viewing. Many cabinets now on sale are pleasing in design, but if you can't find a set to harmonise with your room, you can build one into an existing piece of furniture, for some makers will sell the chassis without a cabinet[10]

10 *House and Garden* Spring 1949 The concern about watching in a darkened room was partly to do with the glare on the television screen

In December 1950 *House and Garden* even presented a diagram of these spatial arrangements (in an article entitled 'Within Your means', subtitled 'An inexpensively furnished living room well designed to accommodate television'), as did *Everywoman* in November 1952 (in an article entitled 'TV or not TV?').

As Lynn Spigel has argued in the US context, the placing of television in the home is articulated within a wider set of architectural discourses.[11] In Britain, Howard Robertson, in *Reconstruction and the Home*, declared that the 'introduction of improved mechanical services, obligatory stress on labour-saving, and an allround reduction in the size of dwellings have focussed attention on open planning and "space-making" within a limited compass'.[12] The modern home was opened up to the outside world It had larger windows It was lighter Bright colours were used in the decor. Furniture was made to look lighter in weight, thinner and lower to the ground Different rooms were no longer distinct and separate but

11 Lynn Spigel *Make Room for TV Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (London and Chicago University of Chicago Press 1992)

12 Howard Robertson *Reconstruction and the Home* (London The Studio 1947) p 10

13 *Ideal Home* April 1960

were made to merge into one another. The concept of 'open planning' was deployed in order to create, as *Ideal Home* referred to it, 'space through unity'.[13] The television was seen, in this sense, as a 'space-making' solution to the problem of the 'small home'.

Although these discourses concerning the cultural geography of the home and the network of actors they bring into play (the journalists, architects, designers, housewives, television and other domestic technologies, such as central heating) provide an important dialogic and governmental space, there was generally, in public debate, little said about the figure of the child in relation to television But Dickens, in her farsighted speculations, helps bring such issues to light, and in doing so brings forth a series of actors and discourses concerning the child/television couplet. She poses the following question:

> And what might our children become? They might become a generation who couldn't read a book, or play games out of doors, or amuse themselves with carpentry or trains or butterflies, or the hundreds of hobbies with which a child can potter so happily [14]

14 Dickens *Television not for me!*

The binaries of Sweden/America, past/future, cleanliness/dirt, good/bad and light/darkness are filtered through the figure of the child and through its localized everyday practices. In focusing on the child, the concern is not simply about the housewife ordering domestic space, but about the mother governing the family. In doing so, the significant amount of expert opinion (from doctors, teachers, psychiatrists and psychologists) regarding general parenting and childcare turned its attention to the child/television couplet and, moreover, came to be considered as having something important to say about this couplet. For example, Dickens declares.

> In America, they're getting really scared of television. Doctors are saying that the children's health is suffering because they spend too long indoors
>
> Teachers are saying that their work is suffering, because they neglect their homework and sit up much too late to watch their favourite programmes.
>
> Sociologists are saying that although TV may keep people at home, it is changing the pattern of family life, because it destroys conversation and domestic activities and concentration on any work or pastime.[15]

15 Ibid

What is at stake here is not whether Dickens was correct, or that her views were uncontested, or even that her construction of significant experts was uncontested. Dickens's article 'brought a storm of protest from readers' and 'roughly, only one in every seven agreed with the views she expressed' For example, Mrs Boyes from Middlesex was adamant that '50,000 women have benefited from the cookery demonstrations'. And F.J. Camm, editor of *Practical*

Television, strongly disagreed with Dickens, stating that '[t]he arguments she adduces in support of these contentions are too specious to warrant special elaboration'. Moreover, he argued that 'on the score of education, radio and television have done more to enlighten the youth of this country than textbooks and homework' Television was seen as a means to enlightenment, to make 'the world a pleasanter place in which to live' and to make of us 'a healthier and happier race' Similarly, Mrs Rostrum from Mangotsfield argued that television is no 'glorious toy' but an instrument of enormous possibilities for teaching young and old.

Nevertheless, there were those who supported Dickens's views. For example, Betty Dale from Leeds argued that·

> Television is certainly a menace to family life When friends come to see us, instead of a friendly chat or game of cards, we sit in silence in a darkened room. All companionship is lost. And Sunday tea-time, hitherto the pleasantest meal of the week, now has to be taken either impossibly early or late, and is, therefore, seldom enjoyed.[16]

16 *Woman s Own* 7 September 1950

These letters were, in many respects, typical of other responses in other magazines. Although there was much disagreement about the benefits or disadvantages of television, the various statements from readers and journalists circled around a common set of concerns The debates about television were embedded within concerns about the family in terms of its daily routines, habits, manners and intercommunication. In 1958 a letter from Mrs Lee in *Everywoman* stated:

> Our three children, aged seven, ten and twelve, have developed such a passion for television that I can't get them either to do their school homework or to go to bed, and then, of course, it's one long struggle to get them up in the morning.[17]

17 *Everywoman* August 1958

She then went on to describe the rows she has with her husband because he fails to be helpful. She refers to him as a 'TV fiend' [18] Such stories of the disruptive influence of television served to foreground and shape the mother as a responsible agent. not simply in terms of banning television from the house, but in terms of forming her children into discriminate viewers. Jan Troke, in her regular column in *Everywoman*, stated that '[p]sychologists say that the right use of leisure turns on one thing, and one thing alone. discrimination' [19] And if the child was to become a discriminate viewer, it was the responsibility of the parent to adopt certain tactics in the forming of this discrimination.

18 The editor stated that she gets many letters from mothers with the same problem‹ and that Mrs Lee should point out to her husband that the children are as much his responsibility as yours and that sitting up in this way is bad both for their health and their progress at school *Everywoman* August 1958
19 *Everywoman* September 1950

Monica Dickens, in a later article entitled 'Every parent's dilemma', talked about television as one of the everyday responsibilities of parenting, and specifically about the problem of letting children choose for themselves as part of their normal

development Reluctantly accepting the way in which '[f]or good or ill, it [television] has become part of our national life' and accepting the fact that 'children are learning from it', she argued that '[i]t is up to the parents to decide whether what they learn from it shall be good or bad'

It is their job to restrict viewing to reasonable hours and to insist that the set is left alone when there is something else to do, their job to prevent their children becoming glued to the screen.[20]

20 Monica Dickens Every parents dilemma Woman s Own 9 January 1960

She argued that, however much '[y]ou may hate Westerns and gangster plays as much as I do', 'to try to ban them only makes them more attractive'. Instead, she argued.

Teach them good taste Teach them morals Teach them to recognize the second-rate, and not to take seriously the cruder entertainment that is offered [21]

21 Ibid

Dickens argued that parents needed to train their children on how to avoid 'dangers', rather than overprotect them. Television is one of the dangers of modern life (including others such as crossing the road, riding a bicycle, travelling alone in buses and trains, sailing boats, riding ponies and diving off high boards) that children need to be prepared for, rather than protected from. Overprotection makes 'sissies' out of children. Television is thus not simply a technology which is used or has effects. Such discourse about television, as referred to above, mobilizes and constructs particular social actors, and makes visible the child, family and home as sites of governance Appropriate parenting could disentangle television from the crude, the mass and the American in order to turn it into a pedagogic device.

Overlayering the concerns about familial harmony and children's learning and discrimination was a concern about their health. For example, doctors advised parents not to let their children sit too close ('sit about 6 to 10 feet away from the television screen') or to stare at the screen for too long ('glance round the room occasionally, as a change of focus rests the eyes') They advised children to sit at eye level to the screen and never to view in darkness (due to the effect of the contrast between screen and room on the eyesight) They also advised that the set be properly tuned-in ('otherwise the picture may be unsteady and distorted and this strains the eyes') [22] Likewise, dentists complained about children watching while lying on the floor with head in hands as this was seen to cause 'malocclusion' or jaw displacement. In September 1954 the BBC issued advice to children not to watch television with their head in their hands, following a warning from a dental association that this was liable to 'make their faces misshapen'.[23] This medicalization of domestic space was also caught up (as I remember as a child myself) with punishment For example, in *Woman* the regular column 'Star

22 Vision 1952 Among many other such stories in 1950 George Barnes Director of Television BBC stated that he was worried about children s eyesight and suggested that children s television might be shortened to avoid this danger (27 November 1950 BBC Written Archives Caversham T16/68) Similar discourses were prevalent in the USA (see Spigel Make Room for TV

23 The Times 13 September 1954

Gossip' stated that the actor Van Heflin viewed television as a 'threat to children's health':

> TV programmes are day-long in America, and he tells me that indiscriminate viewers let their children sit absorbed by the screen, when they should go out of doors enjoying fresh air and their own inventive games . . Van talks as a father – his daughters Vara Gay, aged eight, and Kathleen Carol, aged five, [have their] looking-times rationed to two tea-sessions a week. And no viewing if punishment is necessary for naughtiness.[24]

24 *Woman* 19 April 1951

Expert and popular discourses provide a series of resources for the governance of children's viewing within the localized space of the household.

The gaze of the psychologist

My discussion so far has focused primarily on popular discourses and problems in women's and domestic magazines. However, in the 1950s another series of actors graft themselves (and are grafted) onto this earlier network. At this time, psychological discourse began to be established at a popular level as a resource for thinking about and acting upon familial practices and domestic arrangements. It did so by making the child (more specifically the child's mind) central to the governance of the home. Psychology provided not simply a discourse, but an authority for bringing together a number of actors focused on a common problem: the mental health of the child [25] Psychology did not merely offer opinion, but truth, a veritable science of the child and a means of correctly governing the domestic. This is not to suggest that 'psychology' designates a unitary phenomenon, but that, in broad terms, the mental well-being of the child viewer becomes the object of social scientific concern as distinct from issues concerning the moral, cultural or physical well-being of the child.

25 Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey, *Democracy in the Kitchen Regulating Mothers and Socialising Daughters* (London Virago, 1989), Nikolas Rose *Governing the Soul the Shaping of the Private Self* (London Routledge 1989)

The authority of psychological knowledge *vis-à-vis* children's television viewing was established both through its translation in popular magazine and newspaper discourses, but also, and more importantly, through the institutional networks of the television industry, initially the BBC. In 1936 the BBC set up the Listener Research Department, and in 1939 it conducted a daily Survey of Listening [26] After Reith's resignation in 1938, Listener Research began to be taken more seriously under the new Director General, F W Ogilvie. However, as Asa Briggs states, research was still 'experimental, lively but incomplete, and in places insecurely based' and the 'communication of research conclusions' was still a difficult process. 'policy-making still rested on many other criteria, and most people believed that it should continue to do so' [27]

26 The lower age limit of the Survey of Listening was sixteen In 1951 it included television viewing
27 Asa Briggs *The Golden Age of Wireless the History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* Volume II (Oxford Oxford University Press 1965) p 279

28 *Report of the Broadcasting Committee* Cmnd 5091 (London HMSO 1936) p 16

29 *Report of the Broadcasting Committee* Cmnd 8116 (London HMSO 1951) p 56 and pp 59–60

30 Robert Silvey 13 April 1950 p 1 BBC Written Archives Caversham R9/20/4 In 1950 it was also suggested that communication indices be added to the bread and butter of daily audience research, alongside audience measurement and appreciation indices The aim was to discover whether or not listeners and viewers actually understood what they were listening to or watching This idea was never taken up

31 Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London Routledge 1991) p 19

32 Hilda Jennings and Winifred Gill *Broadcasting in Everyday Life a Survey of the Social Effects of the Coming of Broadcasting* (London BBC 1939)

33 Robert Silvey *Who s Listening? The Story of BBC Audience Research* (London Allen Unwin 1974) pp 173 137

Until this time the BBC had known its audience through Advisory Committees, programme correspondence and the personal knowledges and contacts of the programme makers The Ullswater Committee Report stressed the importance of Advisory Committees as a means of representing the 'views of the general public as well as of experts in each category of broadcast subject'.[28] However, by 1951 the Beveridge Committee Report on Broadcasting stressed the importance of the 'systematic study of audiences', and identified it as one of the responsibilities of the broadcaster.[29] Much of the research in which the Listener Research Department (renamed the Audience Research Department in 1950) was engaged was concerned with providing 'measurements of the extent to which the public has listened to, (or viewed), the programmes which have been broadcast, and the extent to which those broadcasts have pleased them'[30] Audience measurement and appreciation indices were developed alongside other risk-reducing strategies, including fixed formats and genres and weekly scheduling They were, as Ien Ang has aptly described them, 'aimed at the codification, routinization and synchronization of the audiences' viewing practices, to make them less capricious and more predictable'[31]

Although this type of research took up the bulk of the activities of the Department, other research was carried out in-house or commissioned by the BBC. For example, G. Masterton from the University of Nottingham carried out research into the effects of radio listening in 1951. Likewise, A.J. Laird from the Department of Psychology at the University of Aberdeen presented a report on the effects of radio broadcasting. Both were very similar, using empirical data from listeners' letters, which were then grouped into different types of effects. Much of the material was similar to earlier research by Jennings and Gill,[32] and surveyed the way in which radio listening was bound up within a more complex set of domestic and social activities.

In the 1950s the Audience Research Department continued its investigation into what Silvey called 'the social effects of broadcasting' as distinct from 'broadcasting-centred' research, and in 1949, with an annual grant of £10,000, it set up a Projects and Development Section which, as Silvey stated, would call upon the disciplines of statistics and psychology.[33] Out of this new project emerged the Advisory Committee of Psychologists With the assistance of Sir Cyril Burt from University College, London, Silvey drew up a list of prominent psychologists to assist the Department. It included. Sir Cyril Burt, Professor D W. Harding (Bedford College, London), Professor Rex Knight (University of Aberdeen), Dr R.H Thouless (a private practitioner), Professor P E. Vernon (Institute of Education, London), Professor W.J.H. Sprott (University of Nottingham), and its Chairman, Dr Alec Rodger (Secretary of the British Psychological Society). It also included BBC staff: Robert Silvey, W.A. Belson (a psychologist who later became Head of

Survey Research at the London School of Economics), and B.P
Emmett (a statistician). *Much of the work of the Advisory*
Committee of Psychologists was, as its title suggests, advisory It
advised the Audience Research Department primarily on methods of
audience measurement and appreciation. It was not until 1953 that it
first considered the question of children's television, and it was not
until 1960 that the daily Survey of Listening and Viewing lowered
the adult age range down to fifteen and was supplemented by 300
five-to-seven year olds, 400 eight-to-eleven year olds and 300
twelve-to-fourteen year olds Emmett had argued that interviewing
children was in many ways easier than interviewing adults. However,
he stated that parental help would be required with the youngest
children, and that a specially trained group of women interviewers,
employing different techniques of sample selection, would also be
needed [34]

In January 1953, at the request of Freda Lingstrom, the Advisory
Committee of Psychologists was invited to discuss 'the fears of
children up to the age of seven', and 'in view of public criticism, if
Westerns are damaging to children's morals'.[35] The Committee
discussed the 'standard fears of children'. The minutes of the
meeting stated that:

> The following standard fears of children were suggested by
> members of the panel: (i) malevolent old women (Thouless),
> (ii) dangerous situations and enclosed spaces (Thouless), Burt
> suggested, in particular, 'unfinished' dangerous situations;
> (iii) inanimate objects becoming animate and hostile (Thouless),
> (iv) objects approaching the television camera, and thus increasing
> in apparent size (Thouless); close-ups of the human face,
> particularly teeth (Head of Audience Research).[36]

Thouless argued that a child would not be harmed 'so long as he is
only frightened on the conscious level, but where unconscious fears
are aroused, nightmares are a likely result'. Vernon added that a
situation is frightening if 'the child identifies himself with the
person(s) involved' And in relation to the Western, Thouless stated
that they were 'so fantastic and unusual as to create "distance"
between such happenings and the experience of ordinary living' and
as a result 'they did not create a code of morals for the child'

> Only where the broadcast situation was similar to the surrounding
> life of the child, was genuine fear likely to be aroused or
> identification with the actions and moral standards of the subject
> likely [37]

The views expressed were very much informed opinions not based
on any specific research and, although the Committee noted the lack
of existing research, it made no appeal for research to be carried out
in this area

34 Ibid pp 151–2

35 5 January 1953 p 7 BBC
Written Archives Caversham
R9/20/4

36 Ibid

37 Ibid

Even though Silvey stated, in relation to the inclusion of children within the daily Survey of Listening and Viewing, that '[a]fter the war, and even more after the revival of television, the exclusion of children came to be seen as not only illogical but increasingly intolerable',[38] it is noticeable how little psychological concern there was about children's television viewing in the early 1950s It is perhaps not surprising that the advice of the Advisory Committee of Psychologists was not sought when the Children's Programmes (Television) Department initiated its own survey into the child audience in 1952. The *Commissioned Report on Children's Television* emerged out of the recommendations of the Beveridge Report, which argued that there needed to be more outside expert opinion utilised in the making and planning of programmes. The commissioned report was based on the views of a panel who were required to watch children's television programmes from 18 May to 30 June 1952. The panel of eight individuals watched in their own homes, wrote individual reports and then met to discuss the issues and to write the final report [39]

The report was written as a set of fragmentary comments. As yet a psychological knowledge of the child audience had not come to prevail as authoritative. For example, on the one hand the report paid lip-service to psychological categories:

> Programmes about the real world can also help to satisfy the child's growing need to differentiate clearly between the world of reality and of phantasy. .   From an educational angle the drawing of this distinction is also important. Children's awareness of truth, powers of verification, sense of security in their own experience are all closely bound up with their awareness of an inner and outer reality. It therefore seems important on all counts that adults should give them full support in this growing-point of their developing personalities.[40]

Whereas on the other hand, the report reaffirmed, and prioritized, earlier nineteenth-century aesthetic and moral discourses of the child

> While recognising that television is the youngest of the arts and still in its experimental stage, we feel that its aims should be wide and its sights set high; not merely to promote 'active' viewing but to widen the children's experience and appreciation of all forms of art and culture, and help them develop into civilised adults It should introduce the child to good home conditions, good designs and decoration, beauty in every-day life. This is already being done to a certain extent, but we feel that it could be done even more effectively.[41]

It is possible to see, from the report itself and from the minutes of the meetings, how there were quite distinct 'authorities of limitation', which were negotiated and contested within the dynamics of the

38 Silvey *Who s Listening?* p 151

39 The panel was chosen from those who had a knowledge of and contact with children rather than an expertise in television or the child television audience Some members even needed to be provided with television sets I refer to the report as the Jenkinson Report after its chairman

40 *Jenkinson Report* pp 5–6

41 Ibid p 1

group. For example, Miriam Langdon, the developmental psychologist, although profuse and authoritative in her writing, was circumspect and almost absent from much of the discussion. When she did speak, her comments were often ignored or circumvented. In a discussion about children being frightened by television programmes, Langdon said, 'You get a strange emotional expression set up, and it is awfully difficult to make any general statement about how they react to these things. I think a lot depends on the adult's make-up – as was seen in the air raids.' Langdon's professional expertise was politely dismissed by Fields, who replied, 'This may be something for the psychologist – I don't know', and she continued, 'but I should think it was the more abnormal children who are more easily frightened. But there is no doubt that some groups enjoy that sort of thing to no end ' This marginalization of the expertise of the psychologist was clearly expressed in the conclusion of the report, which stated that there was a need for the BBC Children's Programmes (Television) Department to form contacts, not with psychologists and educationalists, who were not even mentioned, but with those involved in children's radio, theatre, music, art, film and libraries.[42]

42 Ibid, p 22

A psychological knowledge of the child television audience was thus uneven in its deployment within different sites of discursive production. However, over the next few years this was to change. In July 1953 the Advisory Committee of Psychologists proposed to initiate a detailed survey of the effect of television on children In 1954 the Nuffield Foundation was approached to fund the survey, and in 1958 Hilde Himmelweit and her fellow social psychologists from the London School of Economics published *Television and the Child: an Empirical Study into the Effect of Television on the Young.* There had been research into the child audience in the USA in the early 1950s, and research into the use of television by adolescents in Britain, but this was the first major piece of research into children's television viewing not only within Britain but across the globe [43] It was closely followed by major studies in the USA, Japan, and Australia.[44] As a form of social enquiry the research was not in itself interesting. It continued the protocols of the social survey into the realm of children's television viewing, but it did not offer any novel ways of researching this audience. However, taken as a particular social document, it provided an exemplary account of a new set of intermeshing knowledges of the child audience, recoding the responsibilities of the broadcaster and bringing to the fore the responsibilities of the parent. The research looked at children's reactions to conflict, crime and violence on television, and its effect on values and outlook, knowledge and school performance, leisure and interests, and also on eyesight and night rest, television and the family, and the television addict. Tucked away in a small corner of the table of contents is an item which holds the key to understanding

43 For example in the USA Eleanor Maccoby had carried out small scale surveys into school children s viewing Eleanor Maccoby Television its impact on school children *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol 15 no 3 (1951) Eleanor Maccoby 'Why do children watch television? *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol 18 (1954)) and in Britain M Gordon had published a *Report on a Survey by the Coventry University Tutorial Class on the Adolescent and Television* (1951)

44 Wilbur Schramm et al *Television in the Lives of Children* (Stanford CT Stanford University Press 1961) T Furu *Television and Children s Lives a Before–After Study* (Tokyo Japan Broadcasting Corporation 1962)

the introduction of a psychological knowledge of the child audience. The complex of discourses which surrounded the figure of the *television addict* provided a way of making intelligible the discursive formation of the child television audience and the way this discourse was caught up in a web of disciplinary techniques.

Two sides of the same problem: discriminate viewing and addiction

For Himmelweit, children's television viewing was not linked to any notion of passivity· 'there is no evidence whatsoever that makes television passive; viewers are as active, independent, and imaginative as controls' [45] Instead of the opposition between active and passive viewers, an opposition which is readily banded around in contemporary discourse, Himmelweit's analysis rested upon an opposition between discriminate viewing and addiction. The concern about discriminate viewing was, as I have shown above, voiced in women's magazines, but it was also prevalent in educational discourses. For example, both the Crowther Report and the Newsom Report referred to the need for teachers to teach children how to be discriminate and critical consumers of the mass media[46] Again, the imperative was predicated upon a need to regulate the relationship between freedom and choice in an age where it was perceived that the old authorities of 'home town, county, church and father's political party' had given way to the influence of 'public opinion'.[47] The problem was that children and teenagers were not 'thinking for themselves', and the task of the teacher, and others, was to form within these individuals the capacity to make critical judgements· to help children govern themselves. Although the specific mechanisms deployed within the educational apparatus are beyond the boundaries of this article, inasmuch as they function within a quite separate governmental formation, it is nevertheless clear that educational practices provide one of the conditions of existence of the discursive formation of the child/technology couplet, inasmuch as educational authorities legitimate a particular forming of the child viewer within the home.

The 'television addict' was formed as a particular pathology within the wider axis of discriminate/indiscriminate viewing The Nuffield Report initially identified the television addict as a 'heavy viewer', a product of a specific set of statistical techniques.[48] In so doing the Report aligned the discourse of the child audience with a longer history of statistics as a particular technique of government The deployment of statistics as a form of science of government dated back to the middle of the eighteenth century, and more recently to Galton's invention of the 'normal curve' as a statistical technique for measuring normality in the late nineteenth century [49] This technique, in the Nuffield Report, rendered the child viewing population

45 Hilde Himmelweit et al *Television and the Child an Empirical Study into the Effects of Television on the Young* (Oxford Oxford University Press 1958)

46 Crowther Committee Report Ministry of Education, *Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education – England* Volume I nos 15–18 (London HMSO 1959) Newsom Committee Report Department of Education and Science *Half Our Future a Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)* (London HMSO 1963)

47 Ministry of Education *Report of the Central Advisory Council* p 43

48 The group designated as addicts were the one third of each age group who spent the longest time viewing This was according to Himmelweit a purely arbitrary designation (Himmelweit et al *Television and the Child* p 385)

49 Nikolas Rose *The Psychological Complex* (London Routledge Kegan Paul 1985) p 42

calculable and governable. This particular form of government produced the television addict alongside other social problems within a specific moral topography of psychological instability, family disharmony, delinquency and crime.

The addict was classified in terms of the biological factors of age, sex and intelligence, and the sociological factors of education and class. Of these, intelligence and class were centrally important The survey stated that among ten-to-eleven year olds, 36% of heavy viewers had I Q.s of below 100 Among thirteen-to-fourteen year olds the number was 50% And while class was not seen to play an important role in the older age group, it was seen as significant in the younger age group.[50] The differential importance of class in the figures is seen as being due to the way in which 'the closer control exercised by middle-class parents diminishes when children reach early adolescence'.[51] These different factors of analysis take on their strategic importance when they are connected to the specification of the television addict as a type of personality. Himmelweit defined the television addict in the following way.

> an addict type emerged who is not exclusive to television; his emotional insecurity and maladjustment seem to impel him towards excessive consumption of any available mass medium. If television is available to such a child, he will view excessively; if not, he will go very often to the cinema, listen a great deal to the radio, or become a heavy reader of comics (but not books) Such children were characterised by lack of security, by being ill at ease with other children. Their teachers often described them as shy and retiring [52]

The addict was constituted in relation to a set of discourses concerning the emotional economy of the family. These discourses, as Rose argues, were formed in the 1920s and 1930s with the emergence of 'new psychology' and were, in turn, constituted within a longer genealogy of the invention of psychology as a particular governmental technology The 'socially adjusted' child was 'the natural outcome of the child's development and the normal outcome of family life' The 'normal family', as Rose puts it, 'could now be specified in psychological terms'.[53] Likewise, Rose states.

> But if the family produced conflicts in wishes or emotions, denied them expression, associated them with unpleasant feelings, or reacted in terms of their own fears, hopes, desires, or disappointments to the child's feelings, what would be produced would be *maladjustment*. And maladjustment, from bed-wetting to delinquency, had become a sign of something wrong in the emotional economy of the family.[54]

In the Nuffield Report children's television viewing was clearly added to this list of pathologies Whereas children's listening was

50 In the older age group 36% of middle class and 31% of working class children were identified as addicts In the younger age group the figure was 25% of middle-class children and 37% of working class children (Himmelweit *Television and the Child* p 386)

51 Ibid , p 386

52 Ibid p 29

53 Nikolas Rose *Governing the Soul* p 155

54 Ibid p 155

55 Himmelweit *Television and the Child* p 395

56 Ibid pp 390 395 Similar findings were made in the USA See Schramm et al *Television in the Lives of Children*

57 Richard Strout, Every cellar a cinema *New Statesman and Nation* 28 May 1949

58 David Oswell Early children s broadcasting in Britain 1922-1964 programming for a liberal democracy *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television* vol 18 no 3 (1998) Shaun Moores The box in the dresser memories of early radio *Media Culture and Society* vol 10 no 1 (1988)

framed in terms of training and good moral influences, children's domestic television viewing was conceived as an element within the dynamics of intra-familial emotions, wishes and expressions. The television addict 'turns to viewing because of the kind of person he is, and viewing in turn reduces his feeling of isolation and insecurity by giving him imaginary companionship and satisfying his need for vicarious excitement'.[55] The types of programmes an addict liked were seen to be the same as those within her/his age group 'except that he enjoyed plays especially family serials, adventure, and mystery-plays which permit identification with the type of active person he would like to be, or with the happy family of which he would like to be a member' [56] The child was seen to develop an emotional investment with television in response to the lack of emotional support and security provided within the 'real life' of the family In place of the image of television as providing children with a 'window on the world' and an extension of citizenship, which was presented across a number of institutional sites, this discourse presented an image of the child viewer as an 'introvert' who turns to television to escape from 'reality' and the duties of public life Such an image, as we can see from an article in *The New Statesman and Nation* by Richard Strout in 1949, had been in circulation prior to the publication of the Report Strout pictured television as bringing the world into the home He presented an image of television viewing as pacifying and breaking down communality. Strout stated that:

> The effect of this illusion is spectacular, and upon children it acts like a drug. I have seen a gang of noisy unmanageable boys huddle before a set for hours, hardly speaking. Is this a good or a natural thing?[57]

Instead of locating the image of television-as-a-drug as discursively distinct from Himmelweit's concern with the uses of television, it is clear that the image is produced within the same discursive formation. And, whereas other discourses of the popular were concerned about the production of new forms of youth *community*, the discourse of the child television audience pathologized the child's *retreat* from public life Unlike the discursive formation of the child radio audience in the 1920s, which presented the overcrowding and rowdiness of working-class families as a problem, this discourse focused on the problem of the withdrawal to what we might call the interior space of the mind.[58]

The introduction of the expertise and language of the psychologist reformed the relationship between the public space of broadcasting and its affinity to the democratic life of the population, and constituted the relationship in terms of the social problems of delinquency, familial disharmony, crime and social decline The postwar period saw a continuation of the visibilization of social and

cultural life, and in the late 1940s and 1950s, the process was intensified in relation to domestic and familial conduct. The proliferation of images of light, spacious, yet small homes were now reconstrued within a discourse of the psychology of children's television viewing and the (dis)harmony of the family. The aesthetics of domestic space and the medical discourse of viewing posture and position were rearticulated within an architecture of the psychology of children's viewing. The addict not only shied away from other children and public life, but also watched within a womb of darkness. Richard Strout, in his article 'Every cellar a cinema', declared of his own family that·

> The children dash in every evening for permission to see 'Howdy-Doody' at a neighbour's before dinner. Squatting there in the darkness will be a dozen watching a television marionette show. Other shows follow. The children are dragged away by brute strength. A recent *New Yorker* cartoon puts the point: 'Remember the good old days', a wife says to her husband with a gesture at the crowd round the television set, 'when we didn't know where they were?'[59]

59 Strout Every cellar a cinema
p 552

There is an obvious play here between the darkness of the viewing space and the increased visibility of children for the parent. Himmelweit argued that more addicts than others watched (and would like to watch) in the dark, duplicating at home the setting of the cinema in which familiar surroundings are obscured. The isolated child, the insecure child, the delinquent child, the maladjusted child and the 'dull' child were seen to congregate silently around the television set in darkness.

However, it was not that television produced delinquent children (for example, through the effects of violent television images), or any other of these 'pathologies', rather the psychologization of children's viewing made possible a whole infrastructure of problems and concerns through which familial and domestic conduct could be managed. This was a more insidious manoeuvre. As Himmelweit stated '[t]he solution of the problem is not primarily to restrict children's viewing, but to attack the various underlying causes'. Television viewing acted as a 'barometer', to use Himmelweit's term, of the insecurity of the child.

> A reduction in the amount a child addict views is likely to be a sign that his personal relations have improved; an increase may well reflect tension and anxiety. Viewing, it would appear, might well serve as a barometer to indicate the extent to which the child's life is satisfactory, provided it is considered in relation to the child's age, intellectual calibre, and background.[60]

60 Himmelweit *Television and the Child* p 396

Whereas the concern with the causal connection between television content and children's attitudes and behaviour was strategic in the

government of television content, the discourse which I have outlined above was able to shape familial and domestic conduct as a particular area of intervention. This manoeuvre connected concerns about television viewing to a wider set of social problems and forms of intervention.

Mobilizing parents and broadcasters

The Nuffield Report had a major impact upon the broadcasting institutions and the press at the time. It was published in the late 1950s, alongside various other reports and pieces of research concerning children and television [61] An analysis of these discussions allows me to display more clearly how the discourse of the child television audience was formed in relation to two strategic objectives of making middle-class parents conscious of their responsibilities and of making broadcasters assume responsibility for the irresponsibilities of working-class parents. The Nuffield Report was keen to stress that it found no evidence to support the view that supervision of children's viewing was greater in middle-class than in working-class homes.[62] However, despite protestations, class was clearly central to the formulation of its knowledge of children's television viewing The Report stated that:

> Parent viewers have a vested interest in presenting television as something of a benefactor, and as a result, especially in working-class families, it tends to be regarded in an uncritical manner.[63]

The Report then included an example of a working-class family in which television provided a common point of interest and conversation, and in the same paragraph provided another example of a mother who kept 'her baby quiet by holding it up to look at television'.[64] However, only two pages later it talked about how middle-class parents 'pay more attention than working-class parents to [the] potential uses of television' These uses included young boys making things by hand with their fathers, and girls showing interest in their mothers' sewing [65] The Report then went on to state that '[n]o rules for avoiding conflict can be a substitute for unstrained relationships, for perceptive parental handling of the child, and for a home atmosphere which is conducive to the development of many alternative interests to viewing', and it provided an example from a middle-class mother of four children (aged six to eighteen) whose 'family has rules for viewing, flexibly adhered to, and the children have many other interests' [66] The positioning of working-class and middle-class families within this discursive formation was picked up in the press, institutional reports and government committees primarily in relation to the problem of when, and in what

61 Of these the most significant and widely reported in Britain were Mark Abrahms s research on the child television audience for the BBC Audience Research Department (BBC Written Archives Caversham R9/10/2 1955) the ITA Report on *Parents Children and Television* 1958 the ITA/BBC O Connor Committee Report, 1960 the Knight Committee Report on television and the family 1960 and the Pilkington Report on broadcasting, 1962 There was also a report conducted for the Council for Children s Welfare 1958 (see Edward Blishen The mechanical nanny *New Statesman* 14 December 1958 Alma Birk Captive children *New Statesman* 14 December 1957)

62 Himmelweit *Television and the Child* p 44

63 Ibid p 379

64 Ibid p 380

65 Ibid pp 381-2

66 Ibid p 383

space, children watched television, whose responsibility it was to regulate the situation and how it could be regulated

The recognition that children constituted a distinct audience in their own right and did not simply watch programmes designed for them was clearly established in the early 1950s. Broadcasters attempted to separate the child audience from the adult audience through various techniques, including the 'toddlers truce', which supposedly intermeshed with the routines of normal family life (washing the children and putting them to bed) and the distinct separation between children's programmes and adult programmes. However, the Nuffield Report repeatedly stated that the problem was not how much time children spent watching television but the 'nature of the programmes' they watched.[67] Thus, as *The Times Educational Supplement* put it, the report would not flatten the carping minority of critics, but would be like a 'drink with a kick in it' and would 'jolt the thoughtful adult into new anxieties just when he is feeling secure'.[68] The paper also referred to the way in which children 'trespass determinedly and extensively into the programmes that are meant for adults' and the inability of the broadcasters to 'parcel out the day between the young and their elders' As *The New Statesman* commented in the same month:

> One particularly useful corrective is the report's insistence on the impact on children of 'adult' TV programmes, up to 9 p.m. or later, in future, no one discussing this subject will be able to do so in terms of 'children's television' alone.[69]

Himmelweit had shown how a large number of children stayed up watching television until 9 p.m. and that significantly large numbers stayed up later.[70]

The BBC had, from the late 1930s, when television was first regularly broadcast, issued warnings about certain programmes. A television announcement would be made concerning the suitability of the programme for children's viewing It had also been suggested that 'a carefully-written synopsis of the programmes should be printed in the *Radio Times*'.[71] Another consideration was the use of a continuous warning symbol in the corner of the screen. However, although these mechanisms of certification were regarded as insufficient, there was seen to be, nevertheless, a pressing need to regulate domestic viewing

The problems concerning children watching unsuitable programmes were, as I have already argued, framed within a discourse of the emotional economy of the family A consequence of constructing children as watching programmes other than those designed for them was that the audience for programmes after children's television was now seen to include children, adolescents and adults Likewise, the inclusion of children into the imagining of the temporal arrangements of television viewing, other than between 5 p m and 6 p m and after

67 Ibid p 44

68 *The Times Educational Supplement* 12 December 1958 p 1785

69 Tom Driburg, 'Father of the man *The New Statesman* 20 December 1958 p 880

70 *The New Statesman* had reported on a survey in 1958 on school children in Widness which had discovered that 65% of children aged seven and eight were watching television between 9 p m and 10 p m (Blishen The mechanical nanny p 446)

71 Mary Adams BBC Written Archives Caversham 20 April 1949 T16/166

school during school term-time, was interconnected to the particular spatial arrangements of television viewing in the home Himmelweit had stressed that television viewing was 'after all a family affair', that it took place 'in the only room available in a home containing children of very different ages', and that 'effectively they [young children] cannot be sent out of the room'.[72] It was not that the imagining of broadcasting as a 'family affair' was a novel idea, but that such an imagining in the 1950s was embedded within a wider deployment of techniques directed at the government of domestic and familial conduct.

72 Himmelweit *Television and the Child* p 53

The space/time relations of family viewing constituted the main concern of the joint Independent Television Authority and BBC O'Connor Committee Report which stated that·

> The television-set is generally kept in a single living-room used by all the family. No-one in the room can avoid giving it at least some of his or her attention. The television audience ought, therefore, to be considered as having no analogy with any other. Not even radio offers a satisfactory parallel It is possible to turn the mind away from mere sounds issuing from a box, but much harder to ignore the pictures moving in the corner of the room. At least up to 9pm, then, the television audience is largely a family audience, concentrating their attention upon the screen.[73]

73 BBC/ITA Joint Committee on *Television and the Child* (London HMSO 1960) p 3

Although the BBC, through its programme policy, could deploy dividing practices in order to separate and individualize the child audience, the construction of television viewing as a familial activity led to calls for greater regulation of both the broadcasters and parents. These calls were also tied to a wider set of concerns arising from the introduction of commercial television in 1955, after the Television Act of 1954, and a concern about the attack on the moral framework of society from the Western and other 'American' programming. However, instead of seeing these concerns in terms of a set of 'moral panics', and analysing regulatory measures in terms of their limiting the freedom of the viewer, my point is that the measures were productive and that they were directed at inciting certain responsibilities within broadcasters and parents

The O'Connor Committee Report called for the introduction of three different temporal–spatial arrangements. programmes suitable for children, programmes not unsuitable for children and programmes unsuitable for children These categories in turn refer to children's programmes, family viewing time and adult programmes. In this sense, television programming had become regulated in relation to the figure of the child viewer [74] The Independent Television Companies Association was resistant to such a conceptualization, and argued that an adult had a 'right to expect that entertainment at the peak viewing hours of the evening will be designed for him rather than for children, whose needs have already been catered for in

74 See John Hartley Television audiences paedocracy and pleasure *Textual Practice* vol 1 no 2 (1987) David Oswell *Children s Television in Context* (Oxford Oxford University Press forthcoming) and Richard Patterson Family perspectives in broadcasting policy paper delivered to the British Film Institute Summer School 1987

75 BBC/ITA Joint Committee on
Television and the Child
Appendix C, p 2

76 Ibid p 3
77 Ibid
78 Report of the Committee on
Broadcasting 1960 Cmnd 1753
(London HMSO, 1962)
79 The O Connor Committee called
for a joint ITA/BBC advisory
council which would contain
people who have a special
knowledge of the mental and
emotional development of
children as well as the medium
of television' (BBC/ITA Joint
Committee on 'Television and the
Child' p 13) The Pilkington
Committee considered the idea of
a viewers' council but rejected
the idea and even relieved the
ITA of its statutory obligation to
appoint a Children s Advisory
Committee See Bernard Sendall,
Independent Television in Britain,
Volume II (London Macmillan
1983) p 164 Demands for such
a council had been made
consistently throughout the mid-
to late-1950s from the Council
for Children s Welfare and other
organizations For example Alma
Birk in 1958 in The New
Statesman argued that it 'should
include doctors, social
psychologists teachers and
parents, and its function should
include the preparation (and
supervision) of a production code
the right to propose changes in
programmes and the publication
of an annual report both on
children s programmes and on
their impact (Birk, Captive
children' p 810)
80 BBC/ITA Joint Committee on
Television and the Child p 3
81 Himmelweit stated that
[t]elevision in so far as it is
more of a family activity than
radio listening is likely to arouse
less fear but television s visual
impact in darkened rooms could
well make up for this
(Himmelweit Television and the
Child p 19 see also BBC/ITA
Joint Committee on Television
and the Child Appendix B p 7)

schools' and children's programmes earlier in the day': '[i]s Television for children or adults?' [75] They argued that the logic of the argument for a family viewing time between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m could extend 'in the interests of children over the whole viewing period, and would preclude any attempts at more sophisticated programmes and stultify much creative talent' due to the fact that large numbers of children viewed until 10 p.m., and even until 11 p.m [76] As a result they declared that '[p]arents must surely accept the main responsibility for what their children are allowed to see during the hours intended for adult entertainment, and the responsibility cannot be transferred' [77] In 1962 the Pilkington Report on Broadcasting[78] received a number of submissions from individuals and organizations concerned with television violence and children, and as a result of the evidence reaffirmed many of the recommendations of the O'Connor Committee There were also a number of calls for the setting up of an advisory council to supervise the relationship between the television broadcasters and children.[79]

Framing these discussions was a sense that children needed to be able to watch television in a secure and stable familial environment which would facilitate their mental and emotional development. Family viewing time was invented as a means of providing such an environment. However, such regulatory measures were not introduced to 'dilute' or 'emasculate' television programming.

> Indeed, the protection and security offered by the family to its younger members should provide the right circumstances in which children can be introduced to many problems of adult life What matters, as the Committee sets out later, is that these problems should be properly introduced.[80]

In this sense family viewing time was imagined as providing the context for 'normal' viewing as well as excluding programme material, such as horror, space fiction and even *Jane Eyre*, which might be harmful to children at risk.[81] As I have argued above in relation to the Nuffield Report, this discourse was not simply predicated on a notion of the defencelessness of the young child, but rather on a notion that certain parents were seen to be too irresponsible to supervise properly their children's television viewing The O'Connor Report stated that:

> The Committee does not consider that broadcasters can discharge their responsibility simply by leaving to parents the question of what their children see. Parents are not always present when children are viewing, nor can they always tell from published information the nature of the programmes about to be televised There are other parents too irresponsible to care what their children see The broadcaster must accordingly recognise that he

has the responsibility for providing programmes not unsuitable for children at those times when it is known that large numbers of children are viewing [82]

82 BBC/ITA Joint Committee on Television and the Child p 10

Whereas some parents were deemed responsible for supervising their children's discriminative viewing, other parents were not. *The Economist*, in an article on the O'Connor Committee Report, made it clear who those parents were:

> there is a grain of common sense in the BBC and ITV contention that parents have a responsibility to send children up to bed when anything unsuitable comes on, but there has always been a clear class distinction in Britain between the parents who drive young people to bed reasonably early and those who do not. Until middle class standards are commoner in this matter of child welfare, the BBC and ITV can at least voluntarily remind their programme makers that, when in doubt about how far to go during family listening time, they should adopt the maxim of Victorian Grundyism 'Not before the children.'[83]

83 The Economist 30 July 1960 p 464

Although broadcasters could rely upon the responsible supervision of children's viewing in middle-class homes, programme makers and planners, regulators and others concerned with children's television viewing could not rid themselves of a vision of the pathologies of working-class families. The working-class home was deemed to be an environment which was potentially harmful to the development of the child.

And what might our children become?

In the 1990s significant shifts in the domestic consumption of information and communications technologies (ICTs) are evident. Sonia Livingstone and a team of researchers from across Europe, in a project that has been referred to as the 'new Himmelweit research', have argued that the social relations of young people's ICT use is shifting from the living room to the bedroom, and from the family to friendship networks. They talk of the emergence of new 'bedroom cultures' [84] Notwithstanding the uneven distribution of ICTs across the population, the range of domestic ICTs on offer to the child has expanded rapidly to include not simply radio and television, but computer games, networked games and other Internet services Nevertheless, the complex of actors and discourses which emerged in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s has shaped thinking about children's television viewing and broadcasting policy in postwar Britain to such an extent that today, when the question of what our children might become is posed, a familiar set of tropes are often revisited. In recent widely publicized research by Kimberly Young, founder of the

84 Sonia Livingstone Children s bedroom culture paper presented to the Second World Summit on Television for Children March 1998

85 Kimberly Young *Caught in the Net How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction – and a Winning Strategy for Recovery* (New York John Wiley and Sons 1998)

Center for On-Line Addiction, a series of stories about young people endangered through their Internet use is used as evidence in the case against on-line addiction.[85] Young is also currently trying to get 'Internet Addiction Disorder' recognized by the American Psychiatric Association. In an article in *The Guardian*, entitled 'Just one last hit', a list of ten 'telltale signs' provide a profile of the Internet addict as someone who has an overinvestment in their on-line computer interactions to the exclusion of face-to-face 'real world' interactions One item on the list states· 'You use your computer to avoid problems in your life and feelings of inadequacy' [86] In construing on-line communication, identity play and experimentation in such a way, young people's new media use is constructed within the binary of the 'normal' or the 'pathological'. Similarly, for example, Nicci Gerrard, in an article for *The Observer*, writes·

86 *The Guardian* 24 September 1998

> Sometimes they play mindless computer games instead, zapping space ships on the violent screen. Their imaginations – naturally so quick and curious, so greedy for experience – have become unfit through lack of exercise. Children of today: passive, sloppy, bombarded by images, spoilt by choice, drifting towards an unready, unreflective adulthood. Technological glut brings intellectual famine. . . . Or maybe not.[87]

87 Nicci Gerrard *The Observer* 30 March 1997

The child, as a particular discursive figure, provides a space upon which social actors project techno-philiac or techno-phobic visions. As the quote from Gerrard shows, such a figure is saturated with the (social) scientific knowledge of psychology (the metaphors of mindless games, imagination, passivity and intellectual famine). Moreover, the image of the 'unready, unreflective' adult betrays a wider set of concerns about the production of rational citizens.[88] Such popular discourses carry the traces of expertise and authority. Psychology provides a resource for making children's computer-game playing intelligible. This is not to say that expert knowledge simply invents this figure of the child (its capacities and dispositions) or that expert knowledge simply speaks in a public idiom, but rather that psychology *translates* these problems and grafts its authority onto our understanding. In relation to contemporary concerns about ICT use such knowledge attempts to configure the child/new media couplet within a familiar governmental terrain Although Internet communications, for example, pose new problems and initiate new policy calculations, young people's new media use is normalized within a familial supervisory space. Jon Courtenay Grimwood, writing in the parents' pages in *The Guardian*, identifies particular means for 'healthier, happier Internet use'. These include·

88 Walkerdine and Lucey, *Democracy in the Kitchen*

> Don't take the computer away. . . . Make the computer visible. Move the PC out of your child's bedroom. You don't need to stare over the kid's shoulder but he or she does need to know

89 Jon Courtenay Grimwood Net results *The Guardian* 1 April 1998)

90 David Oswell The place of "childhood" in internet content regulation a case study of policy in the UK *International Journal of Cultural Studies* vol 1 no 2 (1998)

you're there.   . Make the child keep a log of all the time spent online. . . . Encourage other [off-line] activities.[89]

And just as the parent is configured as responsible, so too is the Internet Service Provider (ISP). Recent Internet regulatory initiatives in Europe and the USA have attempted to constitute ISPs as 'publishers' with consequent liabilities and risks [90]

reports

Midlands Television Research Group

In the 1970s, when there was very little
formal film education, the Society for
Education in Film and Television (SEFT)
which published *Screen*, also published a
sister journal, *Screen Education*. While *Screen*
was pioneering the translation of French
structuralist approaches to film in the work of
Christian Metz and *Cahiers du cinéma*,
Screen Education, as its title suggests, was
more concerned with pedagogies of the
media. The project of *Screen Education*
addressed not only how, for example,
television series such as *The Sweeney* might
be taught in secondary schools, but also the
wider issue of the legitimation of screen and
media studies within formal education. One
feature of this project was the publication of
occasional reports from readers' groups which
had been established by the Society to further
the development of film and television
education. It is partly as a nostalgic salute to
those extra-institutional, unpaid gatherings of
enthusiasts that we report here on the
Midlands Television Research Group in the
1990s, in a climate transformed on the one
hand by the proliferation of formal film and
media courses, and on the other by the
closing down of intellectual debate produced
by the omnipresent concern, 'Will it count for
the RAE?'.

The Midlands Television Research Group
has been meeting regularly for three years to
discuss television and television scholarship,
and has members from Warwick, Birmingham
and De Montfort universities and Cheltenham
and Gloucester College of Higher Education.
The group core is made up of Charlotte
Brunsdon, Ian Goode, Jason Jacobs, Peter
McLuskie and Rachel Moseley from
Warwick, Ann Gray from Birmingham, Tim
O'Sullivan from De Montfort, and Ros
Jennings from Cheltenham and Gloucester,

although it has been open to interested others
on particular topics. We have read books and
articles together, watched television, presented
first drafts of research on topics ranging from
daytime makeover shows to Alan Bennett's
documentaries to the ethics of ethnography,
reported on conferences and repeatedly
tussled with the questions of what the study
of television is and should be. But perhaps
most importantly, we have managed to create
and maintain a space which is both familiar
and stimulating, in which we can discuss
issues of methodology and research design,
but have also learned each other's television
tastes and viewing habits, and can relax easily
into the questions 'Did you see?'.

The group grew out of a smaller and more
localized television discussion group initiated
in Warwick's Film and Television department
in Autumn 1994. This group was established
as part of a more general aim to build up the
television profile in the department and to
think about how Warwick might develop a
distinctive contribution to the field of
Television Studies. Invited speakers to a
'Television Talks' programme, such as Ed
Buscombe, Ann Gray and Simon Frith,
helped the group to focus, in different ways,
on the question of what Television Studies
was, and particularly how scholars might
address the archiving of this ephemeral
medium. Ed Buscombe (then Head of BFI
Publishing) posed the question of which
television programmes could be the subject of
a 'Television Classics' series, modelled on the
BFI's successful Film Classics series. Simon
Frith addressed issues of authenticity in
relation to pop music on television, showing
us the little clips that remain from some
significant performances, revealing once again
how fragmentary and contingent the existing
history of television is in terms of
programmes. It was Ann Gray, however, who
was particularly interested in the idea of a
cross-institutional group, and we would all
agree that it has been the mixture of people
from different institutions which has been

crucial to the maintenance of the group. Because some people have always travelled thirty miles or so, there is a much greater onus on everyone to make it to the meeting on time and prepared

The first meeting took place at Warwick on the 18 May 1995. The agenda was the discussion of ways of developing research between the three universities of Warwick, Birmingham and De Montfort, and for the first meeting we asked everyone to think about 'what is canonical in Television Studies?' Each individual was asked to produce a list of five canonical titles and it was specified that these could be television programmes or written works, as it was beginning to occur to us that, unlike Film Studies, the canon of Television Studies was not necessarily audiovisual. This was a productive and extremely entertaining exercise. It functioned as an icebreaker for the group, but also provided an immediate, if somewhat crude, map both of issues in Television Studies and of the way in which our different trainings, origins, and interests inflected our engagements with television. We discovered that while there was a fair amount of consistency in naming written texts – for example almost everyone included Raymond Williams's *Television, Technology and Cultural Form* – there was less agreement over programmes. The group as a whole differed in the relative emphasis put on written and audiovisual texts, with one member, unable to choose, producing two lists. The programmes included ranged between the first episode of *Coronation Street* to *Cagney and Lacey*, from the televising of Elizabeth II's Coronation to *Brookside*, from *Steptoe and Son* to *Law & Order* The television canon to some extent reflected people's favourite programmes (which, interestingly enough, they considered legitimate in the context) and research interests, with a noticeable bias towards

drama and fiction. Ultimately, the lists did not look too different from the choices 'ordinary' viewers might make, although there was perhaps a little more awareness of television history. Significant absences from the lists included news/current affairs, sport and music programmes. The televising of the Coronation, the single exception here, was justified not because of any textual innovation or innate quality, but for its sociological impact and its role in turning Britain into a television-owning nation. However, there were absences in the written canon, most notably works on television pedagogy. The canon exercise proved useful in defining the existing state of Television Studies and its relation to other disciplines. It became clear that there was little agreement about equivalents to *Battleship Potemkin*, *Citizen Kane* or *La Règle du jeu*, and indeed, that the status of the television text was much more disputed than that of the film text.

The group has since become a more general forum for presenting research, discussing scholarship and analysing television programmes and culture We find we can manage five or six meetings a year – anything more ambitious tends to lead to cancellations – and we have learned the importance of balancing the demands for continuity with the determination to keep the meeting as something to be looked forward to. We all already have enough meetings we do not want to attend, and those who travel furthest already tend to be breathless on arrival Despite our ambitions, the collective readings of whole books, such as Gripsrud's *The Dynasty Years*, Ang's *Living Room Wars*, Corner's *Television Form and Public Address* or Caldwell's *Televisuality* have proved impossible, and we instead delegate one or two members to introduce chosen books, selecting key chapters for advance group reading. Articles, on the other hand, like chapters, are definitely manageable, but are always better introduced. We often come up with our best ideas about what we want to do

in the more informal parts of the meetings, developing an overall sense of the agenda for the year, and we tend to alternate the presentation of research in progress with discussion of introduced readings and dry runs for conference papers. Recent topics have included: 'Audiences and *Cagney and Lacey*', 'Ethnographic methodologies', 'Unwatchable television', 'Recent British TV crime fiction', 'Under 30 – no future *Cardiac Arrest* and *This Life*', 'The Body and Forensic Fiction on TV', 'Youth TV as Genre', 'Camcorder Culture', 'Alan Bennett's television documentaries', and 'Makeover culture'

One of the most productive aspects of the group is the varying interests and disciplinary backgrounds of the individual members, and the opportunities this provides for the exchange of ideas. These differences and the kinds of tensions and divisions that are implied within the different disciplinary backgrounds and formations have become increasingly apparent to the group in a way which would perhaps not have been possible in an open seminar with fluctuating attendance. There are a number of ways of categorizing group members To begin with, the Warwick contingent, as a consequence perhaps of studying television within what is historically a Film Studies department, leans very much towards privileging the text, while the Media and Cultural Studies people tend to be interested in television institutions, audiences and the uses of TV There are also generational and biographical differences For example, there seems to be a gendered division in current work, in which the boys like texts and the girls like audiences There also seem to be generational differences which are allied to different broadcasting models· mature scholars may be committed to public service broadcasting while younger members do not necessarily recognize public service ideals and history as anything *but* history It is also quite evident that the older scholars know comparatively little about daytime television, and tend to work with an 'evenings-only' model. The extent to which these differences – in some ways a microcosm of the different disciplinary takes on television – shape the group are difficult to judge, but unpicking them can be productive because it gives us an insight into the tensions and structures which define the larger field of Television Studies, and can help identify the different stakes that may be involved in the various approaches to the subject.

To break the MTRG into these divisions is perhaps overstating the point. these differences hardly manifest themselves in raging disputes – or significant silences; laughter is more common The group in part maintains momentum precisely because it offers a space where such differences can be set aside or productively explored in assessing the changing contours and dynamics of television and television-centred research in Britain. While the work of the group clearly takes place in a context of changing television, it is also situated in a period of volatile pressures on higher education institutions. The meetings have also worked to provide a measure of insulation from, and response to, the demands of these educational contexts and pressures. At a period when many of us have difficulty in finding the time to speak to colleagues within our institutional settings about research in general, let alone focusing on the specialist study of television, the group has been enabling and encouraging It provides a non-institutional forum where a mix of scholars can exchange ideas about developments in the field and our own research Its sole purpose is to talk about television – a key element in the intellectual engagement which is the prerequisite for innovatory research

Midlands Television Research Group
Charlotte Brunsdon, Ian Goode, Ann Gray,
Jason Jacobs, Ros Jennings, Peter McLuskie,
Rachel Moseley, Tim O'Sullivan

The Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Cinema and Popular Culture

The turn towards historical research in the field of cinema and television studies is now well established, generating a wealth of new scholarship which has revised and considerably broadened our understandings of the complex and multi-stranded histories of film and television. Such work has in turn placed a new emphasis on the importance of data sources, from the holdings of archives, libraries and public record offices to personal and company papers, oral history recordings and transcripts. These sources provide a richness of material necessary for the construction and analysis of new histories of the industrial and technological development of cinema, television and related media, of the contexts and experience of production and reception; of the role of criticism in the construction and reconstruction of canons; of the impact of archiving and preservation on the constitution of a filmic or televisual past. The most important single source of such primary material in Britain is, of course, the British Film Institute. But since October 1997 an important new resource has become available for historical research on the moving image.

The Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Cinema and Popular Culture at the University of Exeter houses a unique and extensive collection of more than 50,000 books and artefacts relating to the history and prehistory of the cinema. The Centre, which was established with the help of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, houses a public museum, and a research and study centre which is open to professional researchers and the public alike. The extensiveness of its holdings means that the Bill Douglas Centre constitutes the second largest subject library in Britain after the BFI, and one of the largest accessible collection of cinema artefacts and ephemera after the Museum of the Moving Image and the National Museum

of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford. In the case of the Bill Douglas Centre, the museum and study facilities are interlinked, giving researchers access to the entire collection, including display items The collection was amassed over a thirty-year period by the late Bill Douglas and Peter Jewell. Douglas was one of the most original and gifted filmmakers in British cinema history, his autobiographical trilogy – *My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973) and *My Way Home* (1978) – remains a testimony to the poetic and revelatory power of the cinematic image. The Centre was founded by Peter Jewell as a memorial to Bill Douglas's life and his passion for cinema, and as a means of using that passion to inspire and educate others.

Bill Douglas and Peter Jewell adopted a broad conceptual view of the cinema and its antecedents, and this is reflected in the scope of the collection which encompasses the development of popular entertainment and industrialized forms of visual reproduction from the Georgian and Victorian eras to classical Hollywood, European national cinemas and beyond The collection of artefacts includes several rare and valuable items relating to the 'birth' and early development of the medium, including an original Cinématographe Lumière (one of around forty still in existence), a silk programme of a private display of the cinématographe to Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle in 1897, a unique menu card from the first London trade show of the Edison Kinetoscope in 1894, and a copy of W K L. Dickson's 1895 book *A History of the Kinetoscope, Kinetograph and Kinetophonograph* (New York. Albert Bann, 1895), which contains his own annotations. The pre- or proto-cinema materials include numerous moving-image devices such as thaumatropes, praxinoscopes, phenakistiscopes, zoetropes and kinoras; original artefacts, souvenirs and programmes relating to popular public forms of image-

based media such as the magic lantern, panorama, the diorama, the peep show and the shadow show; and examples of early photographic processes and an extensive collection of stereocards and viewers The cinema proper is represented by literally thousands of film posters, programmes, postcards, cigarette cards, prints, sheet music, gramophone records, toys, games and jigsaw puzzles

The book collection is similarly impressive, numbering almost 16,000 volumes. The major areas covered include history, theory and criticism – combining a good cover of major works in the field with a particular strength in early works and first editions including Cecil Hepworth's 1897 volume *Animated Photography· the ABC of the Cinematograph* (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney Ltd, 1897), and Henry Hopwood's *Living Pictures· Their History, Photo-Production and Practical Working* (London: The Optician and Photographic Trades Review, 1899), published in 1899. Biography and autobiography are particularly well represented with almost 4,000 volumes. There are novelizations of original screenplays and special editions of adapted works, novels written by film personalities and several *romans à clefs*, fictionalized accounts based closely on real people and events, often dealing with some of the more lurid aspects of the film world. There are also substantial collections of reference works, screenplays, children's books, picture books and works relating to proto-cinema, including a 1658 English translation of *Natural Magic* (London: Thomas Young, Samuel Speed, 1658), written a century previously by the Neapolitan scholar Giovanni Battista della Porta, which includes one of the first descriptions of the camera obscura; and a 1671 edition of Anthanasius Kircher's *Ars Magna Lucis et Ombrae* (Amsterdam· Joannes Jansson, 1671), the first book illustrating the magic lantern. In addition to the book collection, the Centre houses some 4,000 periodicals covering a wide range of publications and special editions, but with few complete runs.

The constitution and size of the collection suggests an immense research potential, contributing enormously to the study and understanding of the historical development of the cinema and of the interrelation of social, technological, economic and aesthetic factors which have contributed to that process But the collection also necessarily poses questions beyond the boundaries of the cinema as a specific medium to embrace the interrelated histories of visual representation, image-based technologies, formations of popular culture and entertainment, and the industrial and economic exploitation of moving images These are all central to the intellectual project suggested by the Bill Douglas Centre. But it is worth taking a moment to define one or two areas of potential research in more detail, one relating broadly to the history of the cinema, the other extending the focus beyond that history to embrace earlier developments in the field of visual media and popular entertainment.

The Centre's collection of materials which relate specifically to the cinema suggest the possibility of a major examination of the broad economic and social impact of the medium over the last hundred years via a concentration on the production of related commodities which have specifically enhanced the cinema's popular appeal. This includes a wide range of items, such as souvenir programmes, posters, cigarette cards, postcards, toys, games, soundtrack albums and various ephemeral forms of merchandising In intellectual terms this poses a whole series of questions relating to the emergence and development of forms of cinema marketing: from the initial concentration on the novelty value of the technology, to the emergence of the feature film as a particular entity, to the branding of particular studios in relation to their product. It also embraces the cultivation and refinement of the star system via the construction and subsequent exploitation of

star image and iconography (the Centre has over 500 items relating to Chaplin for example) and the more diffuse development of movie merchandising as a means of reinforcing the commercial exploitation of what is an essentially ephemeral experience Seen from one perspective, these elements constitute an analysis of the ways in which cinema has been embedded in the development of an increasingly consumption-oriented process of global capitalism. But at the same time this process of commodification has meant that the cinema has infiltrated and permeated almost every aspect of modern life far beyond the actual experience of going to the cinema. The social significance of this aspect of the commercial exploitation and consumption of cinema images is only beginning to be recognized.

The second major area of research potential suggested by the collection is clearly in the field of proto-cinema and its relationship to the emergence of the cinematic medium in the 1890s – posing the question of whether or not the cinema represents a break or a continuity in the history of image-based media While early cinema has become an increasingly popular area of study in recent years, very little academic research has been conducted into the realm of proto-cinema. There are signs however that this may be changing. A more concerted commitment to scholarship has emerged within the Magic Lantern Society, and the recent publication of Herman Hecht's invaluable reference work *Pre-Cinema History: an Encyclopaedia and Annotated Bibliography of the Moving Image Before 1896* (London· Bowker Saur, 1993), and the French scholar Laurent Mannoni's *Le grand art de la lumière et de l'ombre* (Paris: Nathan, 1994; and currently being translated for publication by Exeter University Press) have been invaluable contributions to the serious study of pre-cinematic optical media The existence of the Bill Douglas Centre can provide further impetus for the development of this kind of scholarly inquiry.

The relationship between the various antecedent forms of visual media and the cinema is complex and multi-faceted, but collectively they introduce or develop principles which are subsequently central to the cinematic apparatus: the relationship of the image to the real, depth, movement, narrative, spectacle and the organization of production and consumption – the latter posing questions concerning both the public and domestic spheres. The collection also suggests certain other ways of examining the relationship via a shared concern with the construction of British national identity. If we take the myth and iconography of the Western as occupying a central position in the US popular imagination, then the equivalent in Britain is that of the Empire. The imperial theme – reflected via a plethora of images of royal pageantry, overseas exploration and military conquest – is common subject matter for all the proto-cinema media, and is particularly prevalent in forms of public spectacle during the nineteenth century such as the panorama and the diorama The Empire also has a significant place in the history of British cinema – from early actualities and travelogues via imperial epics from *The Four Feathers* (1939) to *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) to the postcolonial legacy of black British cinema addressing questions of cultural difference and hybridity in contemporary Britain. The examination of this history of imperial representation and ways in which imperialist discourses were propagated is a major area of potential research which necessarily goes beyond the usual boundaries of cinema studies.

The Bill Douglas Centre is still very much in its infancy. Firm foundations have been laid for this exciting new resource for film scholarship, including the setting up of a graduate programme with doctoral and masters students beginning to work with the Centre's resources. However, for the kind of potential described above to be realized, it is important that the Centre be accessible to as

broad a group of researchers as possible. The Centre is a national and an international resource and it is important to stress this, particularly at a time when the BFI is again undergoing major reorganization Central to the current rethink is the stated desire by John Woodward, the new director, to 'open up our collections and provide access to the public of our film heritage in all its forms' ('A Time For Change', BFI Policy Document, 1998, p. 1)

While this will be welcome news to film and television historians, it is not yet clear if the overall thrust of the BFI reforms is informed by populism rather than the pursuit of knowledge Indeed the increase in access relates to what is termed 'the wider world and not just the buffs and experts' (ibid). Scholarship, it would seem, is not a top priority. Such a scenario makes the existence of alternative resources such as the Bill Douglas Centre all the more important.

Duncan Petrie

Cinema, Identity, History: an International Conference on British Cinema, University of East Anglia, 10–12 July 1998

François Truffaut must have been turning in his grave, as speaker after speaker in Norwich demonstrated that there is no incompatibility between the terms 'British' and 'cinema'.

This was a highly satisfactory conference, and more than satisfying to those of us who have worked for many years to counter 'cultural cringe' by persuading colleagues to include more British material in their courses, and to introduce the difficulties and delights of studying British film to our students. The number of simultaneous strands and keynote addresses provided ample evidence that British cinema studies has fully come of age. Fifty-eight papers were organized into twenty strands, punctuated by twelve keynote speakers, including a video presentation by

Professor Charles Barr recorded in New Zealand. Some hard decisions had to be made between the tempting titles in clashing strands.

Appropriately for a conference which continually challenged several critical orthodoxies, film screenings had been arranged, and Alan Parker and Julian Henriques contributed the filmmakers' view. Powell's and Pressburger's *I Know Where I'm Going* (1945), Julian Henriques's *Babymother* (1998), Maurice Elvey's *Hindle Wakes* (1927), Gerald Thomas's *Carry On Cabby* (1963), and examples of Pathé's 1920s and 1930s *Eve's Film Review* provoked reassessments of notions of the Englishness of English film, British identity, the long antecedents of British film comedy, and so on, in the light of the conference papers.

John Ellis's opening address raised several lines of enquiry – national styles of performance, British comic traditions, the role of cinema architecture in the formation of the audience. Using clips from 1930s films he suggested elements of performance which functioned as cues to a 'correct' audience reading, and the importance of repetition in making elements of plot or narrative intelligible to a mass audience Later papers by Christopher Williams and Claire Monk, amongst others, similarly analysed films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, 1994) and *The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo, 1997) in order to tease out how their narrative address might appeal to a British and to an international audience The opening address was followed by interesting discussion of the diversity of entertainments associated with the cinematic experience – such as stand-up comics, community singing, bingo, the cinema organ, tea and sandwiches – rituals which foreground the difference of contemporary film exhibition and reception with its cult objects, its VCR culture and intimidatory soundtracks British cinema was being firmly discussed as the nexus of social, political, commercial and cultural forces.

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Early papers indicated the sheer variety of approaches and fields of research, points which were picked up later by Jeffrey Richards in his 'shopping list' of work still to be done on patterns of filmgoing, on British auteurs and genres, British studios and creative teams, and neglected stars His keynote address related to work on the 1930s, but similar lists could be made for other decades. Cumulatively it would provide the critical mass on which the interesting work currently being done on national identity and cinema could draw.

An early strand on 1940s cinema resolutely continued the work initiated by Sue Harper's study of Gainsborough and Christine Gledhill's work on melodrama in unpicking the monolithic assumption that British cinema was to be characterized as realist and respectable. The persistence of tales of Victorian low-life and of war stories in British cinema raised issues of gender in relation to national identity, and how representations of male power were constructed and used to suggest and develop a political consensus At times during the conference there seemed to be a certain incongruity between the language of academic film studies and the material under discussion. Mirth was never far away, for example, during the De Montfort University British Cinema and Television Research Group papers on 1950s horror, science fiction and gangster films, discussion speculated on the reasons why aliens would bother to invade the UK, and why they might choose to disguise themselves as women.

The keynote addresses of Marcia Landy and Pierre Sorlin provided interesting takes on British cinema viewed from the USA and across the Channel Much productive work has been achieved in the last fifteen years on the inflections of class in British film, and in English film especially. What was seen by some British critics as a failure to make a concentrated political critique of social inequalities and their causes, in the much-admired manner of French, German or Italian cinema, was viewed by Pierre Sorlin as a positive example of depicting the complexities of national identity in a modern, multicultural society. He felt that other European cinemas largely ignored this aspect of contemporary reality and that British cinema, with its suggestions of similarity and difference, opened up fissures in the hegemonic discourses of other countries. Similarly it was pointed out several times that foreign cultural commentators had often championed British filmmakers, such as Ken Loach, and seen continuities across national boundaries which had been neglected by their British colleagues.

It can be argued, however, that British cinema itself offers us the possibility of continual reflection and critique on our own culture because of the in-built tensions between Englishness and the characteristics of the so-called Celtic fringes. The strand on representations of Northern Ireland was especially enjoyable, and useful to those of us who teach the cinema of contemporary Ireland. Discussion was lively and encapsulated all the pleasures and pitfalls of such a study, from the consideration of the functions of border zones to the trap of referring to England, Wales and Scotland as 'the mainland'. This is an area where a pan-European comparison, with the Italian *Mezzogiorno* for example, would be fruitful.

The importance of Europe – not only in funding through the various subventions available from the MEDIA programme, but also in its strategies for regional support – raised interesting issues around the interrelationship between national and regional identity Films such as *As an eillean* (Mike Alexander, 1993) and *Un nos ola leuad* (Caradog Pritchard, 1992) took advantage of funds available for cultural initiatives in small countries or minority language communities, yet, whilst peripheral in terms of British cinema output and success, they are widely appreciated for their very European sensibility in the use of landscape and exploration of national psyche.

The notion of boundaries and border zones was also explored by Andrew Higson. He placed English cinema in the context of European modernism, characterizing it by instability and hybridity, and consequently by narratives of quest, travel, mobility and searching.

The problems of representing male experience, particularly the contemporary prevalence of depictions of working-class male communities, provided meaty discussion in several strands. In this respect the metanarratives of patriarchal superiority and the ideology of English upper-class domination have been supplanted by a new metanarrative positing a liberal and liberated consciousness which has questioned and rejected the old stereotypes of gender, race and class and acknowledges the potential for a multiplicity of identities. This metanarrative was alluded to in John Hill's updating of *Sex, Class and Realism*, which suggested that the crisis in representations of masculinity was a reaction to the expansion of content in British films from the beginning of the 1980s onwards. Socioeconomic changes demanded different stories, and the exploration of the politics of difference – in gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation – reflected the perception that the contemporary world was a more complex place than patriarchal narratives had suggested. Both his and Charlotte Brunsdon's keynote papers recognized the tension between the hybridity of the texts and the realist tradition in British film and television in that, in postmodern eclecticism, realism was perceived as just one set of conventions among many, mingled with popular and avant-garde traditions and codes. In a period self-conscious about representations of individual and national identity, masculine angst could be seen as a metaphor for national, premillennial angst, whilst stories of women which engaged with problems of self, emotion and desire constituted a disruption in patriarchal ideologies, and a metaphor for the impetus towards a different consensus of national identity

One of the final strands, on women and British cinema, showed this process to have been going on for some time Sue Harper's analysis of the roles available to 1930s actresses showed the tensions between the demands of studios and exhibitors and the desire to contribute more in performance terms than the scripts strictly demanded Christine Geraghty's study of the limited representations of mature women in 1950s war genre films suggested that new modes of female behaviour were being rehearsed; and Justine Ashby's paper on the producer Betty Box showed the difficulties historians have had with the careers of successful and independent women. In summing up her strand, Charlotte Brunsdon called the conference 'a landmark in British cinema studies' and the intellectual 'buzz' certainly justified this description. Above all it was a good-natured conference where ideas flew and the presentation of new material clearly stimulated points of comparison and new lines of enquiry. The conference rituals of book fairs, meals and receptions facilitated the making and renewing of contacts

The conference organizer Andrew Higson anticipates that the conference will generate two books, one on the silent period (University of Exeter) and the other on the rest (Routledge). I am sure it will also engender many new research projects.

Mary P. Wood

Screen Studies Conference, University of Glasgow, 3–5 July 1998

*Let a thousand flowers bloom and a hundred
schools of thought contend*
Mao Tse Tung (quoted by Peter Wollen in
the closing plenary session)

Peter Wollen could not have chosen a more apt quotation with which to conclude the 1998 *Screen* Studies conference, for one of

The notion of boundaries and border zones was also explored by Andrew Higson. He placed English cinema in the context of European modernism, characterizing it by instability and hybridity, and consequently by narratives of quest, travel, mobility and searching.

The problems of representing male experience, particularly the contemporary prevalence of depictions of working-class male communities, provided meaty discussion in several strands. In this respect the metanarratives of patriarchal superiority and the ideology of English upper-class domination have been supplanted by a new metanarrative positing a liberal and liberated consciousness which has questioned and rejected the old stereotypes of gender, race and class and acknowledges the potential for a multiplicity of identities. This metanarrative was alluded to in John Hill's updating of *Sex, Class and Realism*, which suggested that the crisis in representations of masculinity was a reaction to the expansion of content in British films from the beginning of the 1980s onwards. Socioeconomic changes demanded different stories, and the exploration of the politics of difference – in gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation – reflected the perception that the contemporary world was a more complex place than patriarchal narratives had suggested. Both his and Charlotte Brunsdon's keynote papers recognized the tension between the hybridity of the texts and the realist tradition in British film and television in that, in postmodern eclecticism, realism was perceived as just one set of conventions among many, mingled with popular and avant-garde traditions and codes. In a period self-conscious about representations of individual and national identity, masculine angst could be seen as a metaphor for national, premillennial angst, whilst stories of women which engaged with problems of self, emotion and desire constituted a disruption in patriarchal ideologies, and a metaphor for the impetus towards a different consensus of national identity

One of the final strands, on women and British cinema, showed this process to have been going on for some time Sue Harper's analysis of the roles available to 1930s actresses showed the tensions between the demands of studios and exhibitors and the desire to contribute more in performance terms than the scripts strictly demanded Christine Geraghty's study of the limited representations of mature women in 1950s war genre films suggested that new modes of female behaviour were being rehearsed; and Justine Ashby's paper on the producer Betty Box showed the difficulties historians have had with the careers of successful and independent women. In summing up her strand, Charlotte Brunsdon called the conference 'a landmark in British cinema studies' and the intellectual 'buzz' certainly justified this description. Above all it was a good-natured conference where ideas flew and the presentation of new material clearly stimulated points of comparison and new lines of enquiry. The conference rituals of book fairs, meals and receptions facilitated the making and renewing of contacts

The conference organizer Andrew Higson anticipates that the conference will generate two books, one on the silent period (University of Exeter) and the other on the rest (Routledge). I am sure it will also engender many new research projects.

Mary P. Wood

Screen Studies Conference, University of Glasgow, 3–5 July 1998

Let a thousand flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend
Mao Tse Tung (quoted by Peter Wollen in the closing plenary session)

Peter Wollen could not have chosen a more apt quotation with which to conclude the 1998 *Screen* Studies conference, for one of

the challenges of attending and reviewing this conference was the difficulty of identifying coherence within the variety and diversity of research presented under the interdisciplinary umbrella of Screen Studies It was appropriate, then, that the title which guided the plenary sessions of this conference, 'The cutting edge?: the past, present and future of film and television studies', invited contemplation of what constitutes Film and Television Studies in 1998.

The three speakers on the opening plenary panel sketched very different pictures of the disciplines they share as both teachers and researchers. Consistently the panellists described a mobile field in which methods, theoretical frameworks and objects are continually altering, due, for example, to the changing status of Film and Television Studies within academic institutions, the influences of other disciplines and an increasingly indistinct boundary between the academy and the market/industry. The speakers also highlighted an uncertainty over what constitutes the object of study: namely, whether the focus of teaching and research should be the history of cinema and television institutions, the history of film and television criticism, aesthetics, audience research, contemporary cinema or the production of new audiovisual media.

In an engaging presentation, Laura Marks focused on the predicament of the alienation of academic study from creative production Marks suggested that the study of cinema within the academy is enabled by, and/or is a sign of, its death or redundancy Cinema, she argued, has been displaced as the supreme visual medium by competing audiovisual media within a culture which is in general witnessing 'the receding of the visual'. She went on to assert that the shifting intellectual ground of Film Studies since the 1970s, constituted by a succession of theoretical (or methodological) orthodoxies, has functioned to undermine the politics of the discipline This has resulted, she argued, in a Screen

Studies which has no clear politics or agenda. Marks suggested that this may be the inevitable, but nevertheless productive, new paradigm for academics and practitioners in the field. For Marks, film and television studies is not a discipline, in the sense that screen studies is no longer clearly locatable within academic institutions, but is scattered across several fields including museums, publishing, film production, and advertising. Thus, for Marks, the cutting edge is locatable only within the burgeoning fields of new forms of audiovisual production.

Hannah Davies supported Marks's view by arguing that a creative connection between academic research and the market should be sought For example, she highlighted the shared interest in audience research of both media studies academics and media industries In contrast to Marks, José Arroyo suggested that the notion of the death of the cinema is a misapprehension. Declaring his optimism for the prospects of Film Studies, he pointed out that with the mass availability of video tapes, satellite broadcasting and cable networks, more films are made and watched now than in the 'classic period' of Hollywood. In addition, Arroyo argued that cinema sustains a whole range of viewing experiences, with the Internet, television and video reliant upon films for raw material, systems of references and models of viewing relations In conclusion, it was suggested that the main problems within Film Studies are methodological, and concern in particular the object of study. He argued that Film Studies has fetishistically focused on the classical Hollywood period, which has led to some key omissions, for example 1960s and 1970s Hollywood and the contemporary woman's film. Furthermore, he concluded, British Film Studies should address its specific cultural relationship to Hollywood films and consider what would constitute the British cinematic canon.

Television Studies remained a relatively minor feature of the conference papers

indicating that for many speakers it is regarded as a separate discipline or simply a negligible extension of the study of film Karen Lury's interventions, in her role as chair in the closing plenary, confirmed the exasperation that scholars of television feel at being continually sidelined and overlooked within Screen Studies as a whole

Hannah Davies commented on the status of Television Studies as the 'poor relation' of Film Studies, but the problematic nature of this relationship was one that remained unaddressed in subsequent papers during the conference, which tended to focus on aspects of either television or film, rather than treating them as continuous or related. However, despite the different history of Television Studies it has to be asked whether the lack of coherence in approach between Film and Television Studies is damaging to the study of television, and reinforces its 'impoverished' status. To use one speaker's example, *Cathy Come Home* is conventionally discussed as a social-realist text, because of the critical assumption that television drama is generally realist (and literary), rather than as a modernist text which is informed by, among other things, the films of Jean-Luc Godard. Jonathan Bignell's paper 'Plays for Yesterday: re-evaluating 'classic' television drama criticism', identified accurately some of the limitations of Television Studies as a framework for thinking about television These limitations were exemplified by some of the papers on television which omitted considerations of form (subordinated to message), image and the practical problems of how to study television historically because of the inaccessibility of programmes. Nevertheless, given the investment in developing home entertainment technology and the fact that most films are watched on (and produced at least in part for) broadcast television and video, the aesthetics of film are necessarily modified by the formal and economic imperatives of this distribution context. It is therefore equally questionable

whether Film Studies can continue to dismiss television (studies) as a negligible continuation from film (studies). On the contrary, it appears that a creative dialogue between the two disciplines should be sought

Given the concern with the question of what constitutes Film and Television Studies, the most relevant and rewarding papers were those which were most explicitly self-reflexive One of the more successful panels of the conference in this regard was on Jean-Luc Godard The two papers on this panel demonstrated how even a short paper can address both our understanding of cinema and the function and status of Film Studies. In an elegantly written paper, 'The nutty professor: teaching film with Jean-Luc Godard', Michael Temple addressed the question of how Godard's films might be taught, and also how they might be used to teach about film. For Temple, Godard is at once film historian, teacher and 'nutty professor'. Michael Witt considered the implications of Godard's view that cinema is dead, and the history of cinema a history of successive deaths due to the introduction of sound, the failure of cinema to 'document' and respond to the holocaust, its failure to tackle the challenges laid down by May '68, and our gradual desensitization to the visual in the society of the spectacle This opened up a consideration of the function of cinema (for Godard, documentary) and its relation to other audiovisual media (especially television) This question is made especially relevant by the dubious status of much of Godard's recent work which has been seen most widely on television.

What was also impressive about these papers was that they considered the relation of Film Studies to teaching, a concern which provided the papers with a grounding and a coherence in linking up with the concerns of the plenary session Both speakers focused on Godard's massive work-in-progress, *L'Histoire Du Cinéma*, which inevitably led them to discuss the text in relation to broader

questions about cinema, providing a sense of perspective that was lacking from a number of other panels. In a simple way, the papers were informative, providing useful background to this little seen project, with Witt showing some rare clips.

Also notable was the panel on 'stardom' Ginette Vincendeau's and Genevieve Sellier's paper entitled, 'The new wave and the popular: Brigitte Bardot in *La Verité* and *Le Mépris*.' challenged the dominant conception of new wave cinema as transgressive through the figure of Bardot They suggested that in comparison with popular films of the same period, the new wave lacked vitality and was particularly conservative in relation to representations of gender. On the same panel, Catherine Constable presented an interesting paper, 'Re/vamping appearances. Baudrillard and Marlene Dietrich', which considered Dietrich as a star who both pre-empts, fulfils and challenges Jean Baudrillard's writing on femininity and seduction.

The other significant panel we attended was entitled 'Queers who kill'. The panel was well produced, well timed and, for once, there was an excellent and relevant use of clips and visual aids. As with the Godard panel, all three speakers addressed a specific set of films and had orchestrated their papers in order that they explicitly address each other This allowed a diversity of opinion and approaches whilst simultaneously ensuring the panel remained focused on shared questions Jackie Stacey's paper 'Fatale sexualities queer theory, violence and popular cinema in the 1980s and 1990s', identified a cycle of lesbian killer films, which includes both mainstream and independent films ranging from *Heavenly Creatures* and *Basic Instinct* to *Butterfly Kiss* and *Fun*. Critically employing Julia Kristeva's concept of 'abjection', Stacey questioned the wider implications of the associations between lesbianism, monstrosity and violence established in these films. Michele Aaron's paper, 'Bonded in blood: lesbian-couples-

who-kill and "queer 90s" cinema', focused on the operation of representations of violence and murder as a symbolic substitute for lesbian sexual pleasure, her use of shockingly graphic and violent clips making for a forceful and convincing argument. Most innovative was Julianne Pidduck's paper, 'Hyperbolic lesbian killers: critical and cinematic excesses'; Pidduck brought new theoretical tools and a new vocabulary for thinking about film to view by employing the under-used and underrated writing of Gilles Deleuze on cinema As a result of the focus offered by these panels, there was a real opportunity for engaged and focused debate afterwards. We felt that these themed panels offered models of success to emulate in future *Screen* Studies Conferences.

The central concerns which arose over the course of the conference were an anxiety about the social position of cinema, the marginalization of Television Studies, and the effect of changing technologies on the disciplines and how they are to be studied in the future. The academic study of film and television *is* diverse and localized, but continuity also has much to commend it as innovative research is not produced in a vacuum but in dialogue What we learnt from the conference is that a stronger sense of disciplinary histories and sets of shared aims and objectives is needed, even while these are the very orthodoxies against which we must simultaneously push.

Our main criticism of the conference is that there was not enough innovative theoretical work in a potentially open and still developing academic field There was also a surprising lack of attention to the image (as visual text), something that, it seems to us, should be fundamental to Film and Television Studies. Finally, ironically enough for papers which often fetishized technology, there was a marked inability of many speakers to use visual material to illustrate their papers

effectively, either omitting clips or screening them without contextualization or analysis.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith spoke in the closing plenary of the difficulty of referring to Film Studies as one thing when the discipline has expanded from a small field to a broad and disparate area Recognizing the tendency to dispersal and the problem of retaining coherence of subject matter and values within an interdisciplinary field, Peter Wollen spoke eloquently of the need for Film Studies to cement its position administratively and academically by acknowledging the importance of teaching the history of cinema. This attention is justified, he suggested, by film's position as the most important art form of the century. Implicit in this, he argued, is a recognition of the importance of identifying film canons which, in any case, are necessarily formed in the interaction with students in teaching and designing film courses The framework for the establishment of this canon of films would then be an aesthetics of cinema which, Wollen suggested (echoing Arroyo's assessment in the opening plenary), is what is lacking from the study of contemporary cinema. In the end, for both Arroyo (representing young, emergent academics) and Wollen (representing the 'old guard'), the intriguing point of agreement was that aesthetics – that most traditional of approaches – poses the questions which they hope will guide the future of Screen Studies into the next century.

Bruce Bennett and Imogen Tyler

Film Music Conference, University of Leeds, 11 July 1998

With about fifty scholars, composers, and other interested parties, this was a small, relaxed, but dynamic gathering at the University of Leeds, notable for the subtle sense of relief hanging over it all – relief at not having to defend oneself for an interest in

film music. A hybrid endeavour, the study of film music historically has been marginalized by the two academic fields which should have been its home. Musicology has not, until the last couple of decades, been interested because the music plays a subservient role in film and is unable to stand on its own – a precondition of its success becomes its Achilles heel in the eyes of traditional music scholarship. On the other hand, film scholars who will happily analyse production design, lighting and shot composition will categorically deny that music has any impact on the filmgoing experience, even though one rarely purchases a souvenir maquette of the set, and no one leaves the theatre humming the lighting. The range of papers and presentations for a one-day conference was remarkably broad and demonstrated the impact of sound on film.

Conference organizer Kate Daubney of Leeds started the day with an examination of John Barry's impact on the James Bond films, in reference to the conference's umbrella title of 'The Composer as Auteur' This choice of example, conditioned by the scheduled appearance of *Tomorrow Never Dies* composer David Arnold (about which more later), was somewhat ironic, as Barry's influence on the sound of the James Bond films has never been questioned, but his 'authorship' is contested. The music of the first Bond film, *Dr No*, is credited to Monty Norman, and over the years it has come to be accepted that Norman wrote the tune (in classical terms, *he* is the composer), while the striking jazz-pop arrangement, including the distinctive bass guitar riff, is Barry's. Over the years, the waters become even more muddied, when a composer as distinctive as Bill Conti takes over (*For Your Eyes Only*), or Eric Serra (or not, as the film music buff grapevine would have it) deconstructs the theme music, detaching riff from brass interjection from melody line, recombining them in a modern, electronic score for *Goldeneye*. Arnold was brought in to return

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the series to a more recognizable sound, which effectively meant updating Barry's arrangement. Daubney demonstrated the effectiveness of the theme music as a branding element of the film series, although indirectly the example also demonstrates the elusiveness of assigning authorship to a composer. Like any element of filmmaking, scoring is a collaborative effort, but unlike the director, who can wield a certain amount of authority (in both meanings), most composers are at the mercy of the director, the producer, the film editor, and the sound designer and editor, not to mention the delegation of responsibility to orchestrators, conductors, sub-contractors, and the music editor. The James Bond theme is a distinctive entity that was itself collaborative in its inception.

Last-minute replacement speaker Miguel Mera (Royal College of Music) took up the problem of the integration of the soundtrack, its music and its sound effects/dialogue A composer himself, Mera argued for the closer collaboration between composers and sound designers in creating an effective soundtrack, drawing on both negative (*On the Waterfront*, Zeffirelli's *Otello*) and positive (*Terminator II: Judgement Day*) examples to demonstrate the need for balance and, on a more basic level, sheer communication, so that the left hand knows what the right hand is doing

Two papers, those of doctoral students Heather Laing (University of Warwick) and Pauline MacRory (Strathclyde University), examined music and narrative in terms of gender and sexuality. MacRory's work on music and violent women led to a reading of *Basic Instinct* in which the music emerges as the clearest element in a notably unclear narrative, while Laing presented the richest theoretical analysis of the day, intertwining narrative and discourse, gender roles, the romantic ideology of the artist, and music history and theory in a fascinating examination of 'The feminine and classical Hollywood film'. Pointedly entitled 'Are you

crazy?', Laing's paper presented non-diegetic film music in the classical 'woman's picture' as an excess of emotion of the female characters, in which the diegetic music of the male musician character is transferred to the woman in the non-diegetic realm Her representative text was *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, and she impressively demonstrated the extent to which insanity and obsession were ingrained in the anticipation and (lack of) resolution in the musical text.

Richard Dyer's (University of Warwick) presentation of Nino Rota's scores as ironic commentary was more impressionistic, yet nonetheless enlightening and entertaining, coming closest to a proposition of a composer as an 'author' of a film's point of view. The detached, coolly amused quality of much of Rota's music is one of the most consistent and convincing examples of what sound theorist Michel Chion terms 'anempathetic scoring' – scoring that goes against the apparent emotions of the characters in a scene – and creates irony in almost its purest form.

Jill Scarfe (University of Derby) looked at the most plentiful yet neglected source of film music on the planet – the film and music industries of Bollywood. Her ethnographic work is concerned with Punjabi children in the UK, and seeks to understand how the children understand the film music. Scarfe and an ethnomusicological colleague had sought to determine whether the traditional associations of mood and time of day with certain rags were maintained in the films – Satiyajit Ray's *The Music Room* seemed to maintain this convention, while more recent popular films had more tenuous relationships What this brief excursion into almost virgin territory suggests is that film music plays on cultural associations to create meaning, therefore they must be grounded in the music culture of their audience. This reconnection of 'abstract' musical gesture, with meaning rooted in human emotion and physicality, is one of the most important elements that the study of film music and popular music has to

offer to musicology, a field that until recently was still resolutely formalistic – which is not to say that the rigours of formalism do not have a discipline also to be desired in more culturally-based analysis, as these cultural meanings are predicated on formal elements of the music

The mid-afternoon session was scheduled to be a composer's forum by the aforementioned David Arnold, but he pulled out at the last moment, to be replaced by film and television composer Rick Wentworth (*Withnail and I, Cracker, Between the Lines, Silent Witness*), and in the end, it was more than a fair deal. Wentworth is an articulate and engaging speaker, and his talk moved from a basic overview of what composing for films and television entails, plus an important view gained from his work as an orchestrator of Hollywood films, to pithy anecdotes illustrating the joys, frustrations, and panics of being a film composer. A lengthy question-and-answer period allowed the audience to ask their burning questions about the nuts and bolts

The audience was also at the centre of the closing round-table of the presenters, chaired by David Cooper (University of Leeds). The basic question was, in a sense, 'whither film musicology?' It's not nearly so fatuous a question as it might be in another context.

The serious study of film music is a field still only about a decade old – there have been isolated analyses and commentaries since the 1920s, but it was not until the late 1980s that enough people were studying the subject to reach the critical mass necessary to generate a 'field' The appropriateness of theoretical models (including the conference's own 'auteurism'), building technological and stylistic histories, the place of subjectivity and ethnography, the relationship of music to other sounds on the soundtrack, and more practical things (access to scores and other materials, copyright, and presentation technologies like CD-ROM for analyses) featured in the lively discussion that closed a very full day, which for at least some of us continued later at dinner.

Until now, film music has been a subject confined to a single panel at musicological conferences, or even a single paper – if that – at film conferences. This specially dedicated conference is poised to become an annual event, perhaps linked to the Leeds Film Festival, and a major international conference is scheduled at Southampton in April of 2001, hopefully these focused events will foster the field and allow it to fulfil its potential as a major strain of both music and film studies

Robynn J. Stilwell

reviews

Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, 465 pp.

JAMES MORRISON

Gilberto Perez's *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* is the kind of book one might have thought was obsolete. It presents itself as a fully fledged Theory of Film – one that aspires, in its reach, scope, and erudition, to take its place on the shelf beside Arnheim, Balasz, Bazin, Eisenstein, Kracauer or, more recently, Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* (1971). Such ambition has been rare in recent writing on film, unless one counts such relative anomalies as Geoffrey O'Brien's *The Phantom Empire* (1993), which for all its wayward brilliance is too poetically idiosyncratic to function as generally applicable theory; or Noel Carroll's *Theorizing the Moving Image* (1996), a book potentially exhilarating in its breadth that is nonetheless ultimately too diffuse to offer depth of sustained explanation. The bifurcation of current writing on film into 'popular' and 'academic' branches which usually converge only problematically, and with mutual suspicion, may account for the recent dearth of such efforts. In any case, Perez's attempt to bring new life to the genre is inflected at nearly every level by this schism.

With rare, though sometimes notable, exceptions, serious writing on film today originates in the academy. As in most humanistic disciplines in the past decades, such writing often reveals the institutional imperative of a scientific, or at least pseudo-scientific, inclination – traceable in the humanities perhaps most directly back to Northrop Frye's *An Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). However damaging this imperative may be to the purely aesthetic value of

criticism in the humanities, it arises as a defence against frivolously impressionistic or dilettantish approaches – as a guarantor, allegedly, of a degree of seriousness in critical investigations. Its result, not surprisingly, has been an increasing specialization within the discipline that in turn, according to critics, has given rise to insularity, pedantry and a different kind of triviality.

That very charge has recently produced a backlash against a body of work identified rather haphazardly as 'theory', which is construed as a unified site of ideology that has exacted unwholesome domination within the academy, where its assaults on universal truths and its celebrations of free-playing difference have allegedly brought about the demise of some hitherto common culture. In Film Studies, this backlash is perhaps best represented by a collection of essays coedited by Noel Carroll and David Bordwell, *Post-Theory* (1996). The book attempts to supplant the academic film theory of the 1970s and 1980s – principally semiotic, psychoanalytic and Marxist – with a reconstructed model of empirical cognitivism. Barely concealing its irritation behind its mask of rationality, the book is a telling gauge of the fraught state of US Film Studies. Positing its own models as fact-based, and therefore somehow outside theory, fetishizing pseudo-science while ousting speculation, the book retains the academic imperative of extreme specialization that has rendered the large-scale Theory of Film, for all intents, outmoded.

Like Carroll and Bordwell, Perez proceeds from a marked dissatisfaction with developments in recent film theory Unlike them, however, he retains many of the most significant premisses of that work, while allying himself with a particular critical style that would formerly – after the rise of theory and before the backlash against it, that is – have been open to the charge of 'impressionism'. Indeed, Perez opens himself to that charge without apology. In an introduction that combines sprightly autobiography with bluff artistic credo, Perez labels the institutional division between theory and criticism a false distinction: 'I don't believe theory should be divided from criticism' (p. 21). The rest of the book bears out Perez's dictum in a series of detailed surveys of directors' *oeuvres* and close analysis of classic films, each presented to illuminate some more general problem in the aesthetics of film. If the cooperative relation espoused between such general reflection and illustrative example becomes clear, it is less evident what Perez means more fundamentally when he uses the word 'theory'. If he means only some encompassing system of explanation that supersedes, and somehow accounts for, a range of specific instances, then it is worth noting that the films he is drawn to are without exception special cases, happy anomalies, hardly representative examples. Where a central branch of current academic film study eschews direct evaluation the better to achieve explanatory scope – Bordwell's, Janet Staiger's and Kristin Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood*

Cinema (1985) is an example – Perez remains committed to a model of analysis that continues to embrace nuances of aesthetic discrimination. The subtitle of his work might more accurately have referred to 'great' films and their medium, especially since Perez distinguishes inadequately between typical effects of the medium as such and particularly inspired *uses* of the medium (see p. 36, passim).

Like Carroll and Bordwell, Perez is quite explicit in his dissent from what have been main currents of recent academic theory. Because Perez does not choose – perhaps, indeed, chooses not – to engage such theory in sustained, developed argument, his attitude toward it can only be called dismissive. Moreover, this dismissiveness is sometimes so overwrought it can only be called compulsive 'Nobody understands Lacan very well' (p. 17), Perez claims in a brief digression Later, he asserts, 'The time of Lacanian–Althusserian theory is past' (p. 18). Perez's acrimonious disdain for such theory, perhaps excessive if its danger is indeed already gone, is belaboured more than it is ever argued, but it stems clearly from an attribution to such work of intellectual imprecision, non-rigour, and simple inaccuracy More to the point, such theory is chastised for its alleged traduction of the alleged pleasures of art:

> [Theory] proceeds on the assumption that there is something fundamentally wrong with film, wrong across the board with the practice and the enjoyment of art, and takes as the principal concern of theory what is wrong with art as purveyor of illusion, handmaiden of the patriarchy and the bourgeoisie, instrument of the ruling order (p. 19).

This passage prepares for an intellectual apotheosis late in the book, an impassioned defence of beauty to which I shall return. Here, it reveals Perez's reductive treatment of, in particular, Lacanian film theory, surely the most elaborate effort extant to understand the pleasures of film viewers. The particular analytical styles of Lacanian film theory, single-minded in their self-declared intention to penetrate cultural mystification and to apprehend multiple dimensions of cinematic pleasure, including both those of psychic mastery and unconscious discomfort, are so obviously rarefied that Perez can see these intellectual styles only as a denial, *tout court*, of cinematic pleasure, rather than as a multifarious anatomy of it. Indeed, Perez seems worried that his own fun might be disrupted. 'But if all that interested me about art, about film, were what is wrong with it, I would not be spending much time with film or with art. It is because I like film .. that I have written this book' (pp. 19–20).

Does any analysis of the experience of pleasure endanger it by restoring awareness to what arises in comparative heedlessness? And

must every account of a presumably pleasurable phenomenon such as movies include a theory of pleasure, pure and simple? These questions are raised by Perez's project, not only by his claim that academic theory derides such pleasures destructively, but by his own critical practice – a high degree of philosophical import, for example, is claimed for Buster Keaton – and Perez also fails to suggest why anyone should take pleasure in hermetic or recondite films, such as Godard's or Straub/Huillet's. Indeed it is clear from these examples that Perez himself takes film seriously, and in that he is allied with the academic film theorists, towards whom his diffuse animosity threatens to trivialize aspects of his own enterprise, as in his defensive assertion that he, unlike them, 'likes' film.

Perez's intellectual style is basically polemical, and he can only rarely mention another critic's work without setting himself in some way against it. A whole range of thinkers, lumped together as 'theorists' come in for chastisement for what often seems to be no other thought-crime than the simple practice of theory as an activity. 'Cavell, like other theorists, confounds the photographic and the cinematic image' (p 34), objects Perez. Similarly, in a later discussion of narrative theory, Perez finds that 'Bordwell, like other theorists, wants to contrast mimesis with diegesis. . . . This is a common error' (p. 60). Later references to 'Metz and other theorizers' (p. 143) or 'the likes of [Colin] MacCabe' (p. 339) bespeak similar collective disapproval, if not outright contempt Thus, figures as diverse as these are classed as a rag-tag band of 'theorizers' who have time and again failed to draw the proper distinctions. Perez's sense of theory itself as an ignoble act is revealed in his passing remark that Bresson's equation of film shots with words, though predicated on classical theory of film, 'isn't *mere* theory but a rigorous filmmaking practice' (p 59, emphasis mine).

But Perez's reference to Metz is worth looking at more closely. It occurs in a discussion of Murnau as a representative figure in German Expressionist cinema, and it runs in its entirety,

> According to Metz and other theorizers, when watching a film we primarily identify ourselves not with the characters but with the camera Whether or not this is true in general, it applies in particular to our experience of a Murnau film. (p. 143)

The caveat in the second sentence quoted implies, at least to me, that Perez believes the claim is in fact *not* true in general But careful readers of Metz will know that this paraphrase is a misrepresentation, made possible by conflation of meanings of the word 'primary'. In this context, Metz does not use the word with its common meaning of 'foremost', but with its specialized, psychoanalytic meaning of *unconscious*. In psychoanalytic theory, 'primary processes' are roughly equivalent to unconscious operations while 'secondary

processes' are roughly equivalent to conscious ones. Metz's point is
that our *conscious* and foremost identifications in film, everywhere
fostered by the institutions of cinema, are with plots, characters,
stars, and so forth, while our 'primary' – that is, *unconscious* – ones
are with the camera; his work in *The Imaginary Signifier* (1982) is
concerned precisely with the relation between these levels of film
watching. Clearly, Metz's meaning could be seen as exactly the
reverse of the one Perez attributes to him here.

It is in the context of gambits such as this that Perez's constant
jibes at academic theory compromise the value of his own project
In that same context, one is tempted to conclude, after Perez's
allegedly commonsense correctives to feminist theory, that he simply
does not know the work in the field. For example in an indignant
response to his own caricature of feminist theory as comprising the
claim that women can't enjoy movies, Perez writes that 'The
evidence, however, is that ever since the nickelodeon replaced the
saloon as the chief entertainment of the people, women have been
going to the movies as much as men and enjoying them as much
as men, though they may not have always enjoyed the same movies'
(p. 18). This assertion, I would suggest, reveals an unfamiliarity with
any feminist writing on film since the single 1975 essay by Laura
Mulvey that Perez sees fit to engage with here (and which he
misreads in any case), an unfamiliarity that seems to include
Mulvey's own subsequent work, which takes up these very
questions.

Another telling example occurs in the book's last chapter, which
presents a detailed reading of Antonioni's work that tries to see
cinematic point-of-view anew through Antonioni. Here, Perez is
extremely dismissive of the work of Seymour Chatman, who, he
claims, is 'a simplistic interpreter in semiotic garb' (p 406).
Accordingly, in a discussion of *L'Avventura* Perez also chides
Chatman for not knowing the difference between metaphor and
metonymy in reading an image in which a father's bald head,
foreground, is 'rhymed' with the dome of a cathedral on the far
horizon (pp. 408–9). Here, Perez appropriates Chatman's
interpretation of the image with such schoolmasterly authority – as if
the visual parallel between dome and head were simply a given,
readily apparent to all without need of the egregious Chatman to
point it out – the reader could easily miss the fact that what is going
on is that Perez is building on an observation that *originates* with the
'simplistic interpreter' Chatman.

Similarly, in a discussion of modernism and film, Perez seeks to
refute 'suture' theory As adumbrated by Jean-Pierre Oudart, this
theory claims, in short, that the subjective effects of cinema reside in
shot relations, like the shot/reverse-shot figure, that conceal
limitations of the film frame or somehow otherwise overcome the
sense of epistemological absence on which cinema is seen to be

predicated. Taking this claim as dependent exclusively on point-of-view shots, Perez writes,

> This theory can be refuted with a single example. A character is alone in a room and suddenly we cut behind the character's back to a shot of a doorknob turning and the door starting to open. This shot is no one's reverse angle; its effect depends precisely on its showing us something the character is not positioned to see That this kind of shot is a cliché of the suspense film only illustrates how common it is for a shot to show us something that is not before the eyes of anyone in the film. (p. 302)

Whether or not Perez is familiar with subsequent work by Daniel Dayan, Stephen Heath or Kaja Silverman that extends 'suture' beyond the shot/reverse-shot structure, Oudart himself makes clear (in an essay first translated into English in *Screen* in 1977) that his theory is not linked exclusively to points-of-view of characters in film. In fact, one of Oudart's chief examples is from Buster Keaton's *The General*, a reverse-field cut that reveals precisely what Keaton's character is *not* aware of: Northern troops advancing behind him. Strikingly, Oudart's example is one that Perez himself has introduced in another earlier context in his chapter on Keaton, where he makes a point so little incompatible with suture theory as to be, in fact, quite fully akin to it: 'If [Keaton's] perspective is limited, so also, we're not allowed to forget, is ours' (p. 112). Significantly, Perez's treatment of the same example to make much the same point bears no citation to Oudart's earlier work, and yet two-hundred pages later, that work, albeit misrepresented, gets duly 'refuted'.

As a scholar, Perez might have avoided practices such as these; as a critic, he is, of course, under no obligation to take any heed whatsoever of academic theory. Yet quite apart from the scholarly lapses that so damage the book, the larger point is that Perez's work, for all its defensiveness against them, absorbs many of the basic precepts of academic film theory. One of the book's most appealing features is its eclecticism, and Perez has read far more widely in classical film theory than have many of his counterparts in more conventionally academic criticism. Yet precedents to the key concerns of this book will be found not in classical, but in contemporary film theory. In particular, Perez's treatment of the dialectic of absence and presence in film links his work inextricably to currents of post-structuralism, for all that he emphasizes the purely 'formal' aspect of the relation· 'The play of presence and absence is central to the movies, but presence and absence in the realm of representation... Presence is not an illusion in the movies, nor absence a fact. presence and absence are conventions of cinematic representation' (pp 25–6) When Perez speaks critically of the 'naturalizing' or 'universalizing' impulses in the work of Robert Flaherty, for instance, he brings the vocabulary of poststructuralism

quite explicitly to bear, even if the deployment interestingly evinces
Perez's resistance, as in this later case: 'Good and bad in most
Westerns are not metaphysically given or personally inherent but, as
is said nowadays, socially constructed, and constructed, moreover, in
the terms of a society that is not established but itself under
construction' (p. 237). Even if Perez thinks he is talking about social
construction here only because it is in vogue 'nowadays', the fact
remains that he is talking about it, and it is fundamental to his
argument His discussions of the 'male gaze', too, have been enabled
precisely by the 'theorizers' he expends so much energy in rebutting.
Again and again, the ways Perez frames questions, if not the ways
he answers them, are influenced by the very work for which he has
so little use. This suggests that poststructuralist theory has left some
indelible marks, even if its adversaries gleefully prophesy its passing.
It also suggests that adventurous criticism, as Perez's sometimes is,
might now begin to broach some of the institutional divisions that
have so long restricted it.

In fact, Perez's work seems more nimbly speculative than truly
adventurous, more synthetically lucid than authentically original, but
it goes some way in reinvigorating the seemingly defunct genre it
represents, if only by sustaining the effort for so long. It makes some
important contributions to thinking about film, when it is not
engaged too wholeheartedly in fending off imaginary dangers, and it
is now time to turn from the book's embattled relation with the
institution of theory to the nature of those contributions

Two of Perez's key topics are familiar ones in film theory, from
its classical to its contemporary phases. These are the relation of
cinematic representation to reality and the nature of spectators'
identifications before the film image. Perez's valuation of nuance
leads him to mistrust schematization, and as a result his observations
about these topics are dispersed throughout the book, recurring under
differing rubrics, rather than gathered systematically, yet they emerge
clearly enough According to Perez, film's relation to the real is
determined by its indexical nature, bearing a physical imprint of
actuality, yet it is everywhere governed by the conventions of
representation. The paradoxical title of the book is not far removed
from that of Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier*, a title Perez professes
to find nonsensical. Where Metz proposes film as a meeting ground
of symbolic, signifying practices with seemingly incongruous primal,
imaginary responses, Perez emphasizes the collision of a material
medium with its fantasized constructs In this, he negotiates a kind of
reconstructed Bazinian realism with a modernist consciousness of
artifice

Perez's position on this issue gives rise, in turn, to an
understanding of spectatorship as a product of such negotiations and,
consequently, as a more equivocal activity than he argues has usually
been supposed Perez faults psychoanalytic film theory for positing

too naive a figure of the spectator: 'Except for babies, nobody watching a movie believes reality to be present on the screens or feels deprived by its absence' (p 25). Even if one finds Perez's reading of psychoanalysis somewhat literal-minded, and even if one knows Perez is hardly alone in his call for a more malleable theory of identification, that call does result in greater latitude in the framing of the concept.

> That identification is a matter of degree is nowhere more evident than in the shot/reverse-shot. We couldn't switch back and forth between two characters, we couldn't accept the convention asking us to switch, if our identification were all with one character and not at all with the other, if we didn't to some degree identify ourselves with both of them. (p. 305)

It might be interesting, though, to examine this claim in light of Perez's earlier discussion of point-of-view and the 'male gaze' in *Vertigo*:

> [T]he camera's being empowered does not mean that a character is empowered when the camera takes that character's place in a point-of-view shot. Laura Mulvey and other theorizers of the male gaze in films assume that the male hero is empowered by point of view shots taken from his perspective [sic]; but the Jimmy Stewart character in *Vertigo* (1958), to use an example Mulvey adduces, is being manipulated rather than empowered when he follows Kim Novak's character around San Francisco, as are we when we share his perspective in Hitchcock's enhancing point-of-view shots. (p. 75)

These sequences are organized as shots/reverse-shots, but any attentive viewer sees that the shots of Stewart, even when Novak is looking back at him, are presented 'objectively', while the differently textured shots of Novak, using soft-focus, distorting lenses, and stylized lighting, are thereby coded as Stewart's subjective point-of-view. Thus, even when presenting the literal vantage points of both of them, the sequence does not present alternating views of what Stewart sees and what Novak sees Rather, it alternates views of Stewart looking with views of what he sees, obviously a different formal strategy with very different implications. Suppose, however, taking up Perez's claim that we identify with both parties shown in a shot/reverse-shot sequence, we circumvent the manipulations of the text and, as many viewers clearly do, rebelliously identify with Novak all the same, or even with the allegedly disempowered Stewart, for that matter. Are we then answering the imperatives of Perez's theory of point-of-view or flouting his critique of the 'male gaze'? It is clear, in any case, that his work leaves no room for discussion of this kind of counterinterpretation or of variability of spectator response, and it is the link between his realist biases and

his conception of identification, implying that the materialism of cinema will always dependably guide and limit viewers' responses to films, that rules out any such possibility

Perhaps Perez's most original and challenging theoretical contribution lies in the elaborate distinction he draws between narrative and dramatic construction in film According to Perez, the nature of film *as representation* has been treated insufficiently in film theory. As a result, he claims, film has been erroneously theorized as an essentially *narrative* art. 'Narrative recounts a story as something that happened in the past; drama enacts a story and makes it present before an audience' (p 56), writes Perez. Given the shared reliance on story here, one that narrative theorists have made all but universal, the distinction may seem to be a fine one indeed, but it is really a theory of *act*, not a theory of sign. It is predicated on two different ways of *doing something* to or with the texts of stories. The temporality of film as a medium may well mean it always has a story of some kind to tell, but the material embodiment of particular stories, Perez would have us remember, is hardly insignificant to their meanings. What Perez associates with drama is precisely a kind of embodiment – gesture, ritual, the access of space, a kind of presentness that exceeds illusionism by being defined as act It is, moreover, for Perez, a specifically *social* act:

> Drama is a social thing, something done in public, a performance before a public. Narrative since the rise of the novel has been mainly a private thing, something the writer writes alone and each of us readers reads alone (p. 87)

This insistence on a distinction between narrative and drama, so formative of Perez's theoretical position, might itself seem to be merely academic if it did not underpin larger concerns in the book. Indeed, Perez's agenda turns out to be to deny the linguistic bias in thinking about film that has been so common since Eisenstein, and thus to retain, even to celebrate, some irreducible element of materiality available in the film image. 'Words in a narrative mediate between us and the world they tell about', writes Perez. 'Like the words of a narrator, the camera mediates between us and the world. But the camera is much more direct than words· its mediation is peculiarly immediate' (p 65) Perez's commitment to materialism remains based in the film text. He does not follow the neo-Brechtian line that films are supererogatory, merely and inevitably idealizing an existent reality that itself remains primary. Rather, for Perez, film preserves elements of materiality that cannot be boiled down to plots and characters on the one hand, nor to the cinematic apparatus itself on the other

It is not surprising that the terms of Perez's commitment become clearest in a chapter called 'The meaning of revolution', because the commitment amounts to nothing less than an effort to forge a politics

of the aesthetic. A near-definitive interpretation of Dovzhenko's great film *Earth* (1930), this chapter shows how Perez proposes to retain 'reality' as a viable category without acceding to the socially regressive ends of ideologues who would install reality as the justification of oppression:

> Meaning and synthesis are a construction, not something inherent in things or merely discovered in them but something invented, put together; but with Dovzhenko meaning and synthesis are a construction put together in vital give and take with concrete things . Yet meaning can transact attentively with particulars, synthesis with individuals, and in Dovzhenko meaning and synthesis do A striving for a larger order, for the general that subsumes the particular, the system that transcends the individual, is not incompatible with an ardent regard for the particularity and the individuality of people and things. (p. 176)

It is no wonder that Perez propounds a reconstructed version of modernism in which Brecht is found to be closer to the political humanism of Renoir than to the monolithic communism (in Perez's account) of Eisenstein. After all, the function of the 'alienation-effect,' Perez reminds us, is to stave off alienation, and it does so, in his terms, by 'narrativizing' 'drama' – revealing the persistence of matter by recounting it critically at an engaged distance from itself.

Even on its own terms, however, Perez's politics of the aesthetic yields troubling contradictions. Rejecting 'the simplistic notion that the camera doesn't lie' (p. 30), Perez points to the convention in television news of showing the reporter on the location of a story:

> It's a specious credibility that the news report gains from the location. . Although intended to seem so, the reporter's words do not become more trustworthy by virtue of the camera-reproduced White House or Beirut streets we glimpse in back (p. 30)

But surely, in actuality, the reporter's real presence on that site gives her access to events there not otherwise available, and it is that assumption that is signified by the convention A reporter standing before a *false* backdrop in a studio would suggest, in material terms, very different effects. At times, then, Perez's fixation on the purely textual, his validation of close reading as a form of empiricism, causes his avowed materialism to falter

Perez's dissent from postmodern scepticism sees the latter as destructively disavowing the traces of the real itself that, for Perez, linger within representation. This too is an implicitly political position, for Perez goes on to argue that if we deny the foundation of the real, we are powerless to change it.

> The recognition of arbitrariness [in contemporary theory] will supposedly lead to the realization that things can be changed. But

changed toward what? Not changed for the better, for there can be
nothing better, only more arbitrariness, if all our conventions and
systems of expression, all our human transactions, can only be
arbitrary (p. 22)

It is probably no use arguing that there are plenty of other grounds
than reality as such on which one can claim one arbitrary thing is
better than another. Perez's materialism is far more appealing as a
harbinger of democratic notions (as on p 177) than as the expression
of a longing for ultimate grounding in universals. To be sure, not
least of the troubling features of Perez's defence of beauty against
the onslaughts of postmodernism in his chapter on Godard is the
disingenuousness of its contexts and the complacency of its attitudes
Arguing that Godard's film *Nouvelle Vague* is 'obscure yet
luminously beautiful', Perez goes on.

Beauty nowadays is largely out of fashion. Postmodernists mostly
disown it. As a quality men see in women . . . feminists largely
discountenance it. . . In the puritanism of today . . . beauty is to
be approached with the protective crucifix of (Right or Left)
political correctness. (p. 364)

First, one may need to remind Perez here that it is not the
postmodernists who would deny Godard's film the cherished mantle
of beauty; it is the very John Simons and Vincent Canbys whom
Perez, has just finished quoting – this, of course, despite those
critics' own high and tirelessly pledged regard for beauty. Further,
one might expect even the most idiosyncratic materialist to
acknowledge that the beauty he celebrates in 1998 is not the same
one that Walter Pater, say, used to embrace with such elegantly
refined passions
   Without such acknowledgement, Perez's paean to beauty takes on
something of the silliness of many of the postmodern litanies he
descries. Even so, it remains somewhat refreshing to see an entry for
'beauty' in the index of a film book from a university press, and
Perez's resistance to intellectual fashion is indeed admirable in those
moments when it is not merely self-congratulatory or dependent on
misconceived ideas. That resistance is, however, finally more a
matter of intellectual style than it is of ideological position If Perez
fashions himself a pariah in the critical landscape, it is because of
the kind of critic he aspires to be, a practitioner of what in former
times might have been called 'belles-lettres', speaking to the same
general audience critics of, say, the 1970s might have seen
themselves addressing. Indeed, Perez has published over the last
thirty years in such journals as *The Hudson Review, Raritan* and *The
Yale Review*, and thus he is a holdover from an earlier breed of critic
for whom the practice of criticism was understood not primarily as
an instrument for the analysis of culture, as the spur to politics or

simply as an aid to pedagogy, but as an exercise in civilized
sensibility, implicitly intended to preserve endangered values. In the
1970s (when, in fact, Perez began to publish), such writers as
Jonathan Baumbach at *Partisan Review*, Charles Thomas Samuels at
The American Scholar, or Alan Spiegel at *Salmagundi* brought
similar presumptions to the practice of criticism in a mode that went
well beyond film reviewing, representing some of the finest film
criticism of the time. The passing of such a tradition certainly says
something about the status of film in culture today, as many of these
journals discontinued coverage of film, and many such critics gave
up writing about it, because developments in the medium and in its
critical apparatus had ceased to interest them.

Fine as the journals Perez publishes in might be, publication in
them would not ordinarily guarantee tenure to most academics,
because they are neither specialized nor refereed. Publishing his first
book at the age of fifty-five, yet long tenured at Sarah Lawrence
College, Perez seems to have escaped the imperatives of university
life that usually hasten academics to publish a first book. The point
is that criticism is a form of work determined by the institutions that
support and demand it, and even as it is engendered by the support,
it is constrained by the demand. The inanity of newspaper criticism,
for instance, results from restrictions imposed by the institutions of
journalism, and even the best bears the stamp of these limitations.
Perez's disdain for academic criticism may well derive from his
failure to recognize how its attributes are shaped by the university as
an institution. (From that vantage point, it is easier to see, for
example, how the university's often troubled equilibration of teaching
and research produces the partition of criticism and theory) As a
manifestation of exceptionalism, Perez's bridging of the divide
between theory and practice merely reinforces that divide, as a form
of professional commitment, however, it remains a worthy effort.

review:

DIMITRIS ELEFTHERIOTIS

Thinking about Richard Dyer's book *White* in the aftermath of the *Screen* Studies Conference (see pp 96–100 of this issue), with its plenary sessions dedicated for the second year running to anxieties about the past, present and future of Film Studies, gives me a reassuring, warm and confident feeling about our discipline. The book is at one and the same time a very good example of Anglo–US film theory as developed since the 1970s, and a practical negation of some of the most negative aspects of it. It belongs to a tradition of commitment to foregrounding the apparatus of representation and studying the positions structured by and within it This is a familiar critical/theoretical trope in Film Studies. the attack on the transparency of the means of representation and its ideological implications; the focus on the taken-for-granted sexual division of labour in mainstream films, the criticism of normative conceptual paradigms and/or educational practices A double movement usually characterizes this diverse body of work. first, the identification and deconstruction of a 'mystified', 'concealed', or 'normal' term, mechanism or position, and secondly, the exploration of the power structures and relations that this entails. In the worst examples of this work we also encounter the arrogant belief that practice should follow theory, that films should change in order to reflect the insights of the theoretical work In the best examples we find an awareness of position, a self-critical acknowledgement of the place from which one speaks about and produces theory

White is about examining a particular identity ('white') which is

usually concealed in culture. This is the effect of posing a simple (but conceptually complex and politically important) question how in racial terms does whiteness pass for nothingness? White power is then accounted for in terms of this invisibility. 'There is no more powerful position than that of being "just" human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the communality of humanity Raced people can't do that – they can only speak of their race' (p. 2) Various forms of this fundamental structure of power are analysed extensively in the course of the book

But *White* is different from the 'model film theory text' in two important ways Unlike other theorists of the 1970s and 1980s, Dyer's work is deeply political, yet avoids becoming programmatic Crucial in this respect is Dyer's anxious questioning of the political and educational implications of his argument The question 'what is the use of my book?' is certainly not one that introduces the work of most writers. Without compromising the rigour of his research and the quality of his argument, Dyer prioritizes a practical, political and educational principle over the abstract, narcissistic and often arrogant 'research for research's sake' attitude of many academics in the field In an environment of competitiveness, performance criteria and research ratings, Dyer's work is an invigorating (and much needed) breath of fresh air.

Connected to this is another characteristic of *White* (and indeed of most of Dyer's work) concerning the style of the presentation The language used is reader-friendly, expressing the ideas and arguments clearly, avoiding endless qualifications, complex articulations and esoteric theoretical deliberations. This does not mean that the argument is in any sense simplistic or reductive; on the contrary, the book is remarkable in terms of its conceptual, methodological and analytical wealth. Of course the simplicity of the presentation in *White* is not only a matter of using a clearer and more straightforward language, but also of focusing on the most ordinary, everyday and obvious instances of cultural meaning attached to 'whiteness' This not only grounds the argument on extremely familiar examples (and thus constructs an additional level of simplicity) but it also reveals the power effects of these taken-for-granted moments and expressions of everyday life (and thus offers an experiential way of relating to the concepts).

This is particularly true in the second chapter of the book, 'Coloured white, not coloured', which discusses colour (and the absence of it) as a way of characterizing a social group This chapter investigates the ways in which different senses of whiteness ('hue', 'skin' and 'symbol') work together in terms of a 'slippage' of meaning from one sense to the other(s) (from hue to skin to symbol and vice versa in numerous combinations) to produce the complex, contradictory, graded, evasive and powerful whiteness of white people 'the wide application of white as symbol, in non-racially

specific contexts, makes it appear neutral: white as good is a universal abstraction, it just happens that it coincided with people whose skin is deemed white. The uncertainties of whiteness as a hue, a colour and yet not a colour, make it possible to see the bearers of white skin as non-specific, ordinary and mere, and, it just so happens, the only people whose colour permits this perception. . . . To name and to sense white people as white has proved a breathtakingly effective means of maintaining our non-particular, particular power' (pp. 68–70).

The discussion of 'skin' in this chapter, however, underlines some of the methodological problems of Dyer's project Whiteness, he argues, is not simply a matter of being white of 'hue' but of being categorized as white socially – in other words to conform with the (changing) sets of socially determined meanings attached to whiteness. Yet colour really matters, as differences in terms of hue are extensively employed within representation to portray visually social and cultural difference. Dyer brilliantly explores how these differences are articulated in terms of gender, class and ethnicity, and concludes that the ability to construct whiteness as multiple and dynamic has a 'profoundly controlling effect . . white people are who white people say are white' (p. 48). Crucial to the argument of the book (as signalled in the first chapter) is to approach whiteness as a unity, as a concept that can be perceived and analysed as singular ('whiteness *qua* whiteness'), to pin down this elusive category and to overcome one of the most stubborn obstacles in studies of whiteness: 'but we are all so different from each other' This methodological and political imperative leads, nevertheless, to a certain degree of reduction and a feeling of 'injustice' when the histories of ethnic groups (such as the Irish or the Jews) are seen not as struggles to survive (at worst) or to achieve equality (at best), but as efforts to get 'access to privilege, power and wealth' (p 52)

The third chapter ('The light of the world') is the last of those dealing with general frameworks, and perhaps the best in the book It deals with the ways in which technologies and aesthetics of lighting in the visual media construct regimes of representation around whiteness which, although they appear to be totally neutral are in fact, as Dyer demonstrates, very much informed by practices and ideologies of social discrimination This involves a detailed examination of how practical, technical and aesthetic 'norms' (such as 'exposures and lighting set-ups, as well as make-ups and developing processes' [p 90]) are established around the practice of 'normal' or 'ordinary' lighting in photography, film and television, and how this 'normality' is one that renders whiteness as the structuring norm in representation Furthermore, this technical/aesthetic construction of whiteness as the norm is, in many cases, 'also redolent of aspects of the conceptualisation of whiteness discussed in previous chapters' (p 98) Dyer locates this within a

'much more general culture of light' (p. 103) cultivated in the technologies of the late eighteenth century and reaching its apotheosis in the next two centuries: 'the technology of lighting thus produced new expectations of everyday life – that it could be assumed to be visible at all times as required – and of dramatic art – that it took place in a separate space flooded with meaning creating light. Both are part of an epistemology of light, at once analytic and metaphorical ' (p. 108). Dyer, then focuses on two important 'assumptions' about light in cultural production the belief that the world is transparent (most evident in the very basis of such visual media as painting and photography) and the notion that light comes from above (equally evident in photographic media, but also informing the aesthetics of lighting in cinema). The chapter concludes with an investigation of a specific technology of light and lighting which produces one of the most common and heavily symbolic aesthetic effects: the 'glow' that defines countless representations of white women in all visual media.

The book also contains two case studies; the first ('The white man's muscles') analyses the white muscular, male body of the Italian peplum, while the second ('There is nothing I can do' Nothing!') in the context of television drama (*The Jewel in the Crown*), explores the relationship between narratives of imperial decline and a particular form of white femininity characterized by the inability to act in ways that can be personally and historically meaningful or effective. The final chapter (White death') is a close reading of films which articulate a close link between whiteness and death

It is worth discussing very briefly some problems with the argument of the first of the two case-studies, problems which have not so much to do with the analysis of the function of the body of the (white) hero of the peplum, but with the assertion, at the beginning of the chapter that the hyper-muscularity of the built body is an essential component of white masculinity· 'Body building in popular culture articulates white masculinity The body shapes it cultivates and the way it presents them draw on a number of white traditions . . Classicism, Californianism, barbarianism and crucifixionism are specific, strongly white representational traditions. Equally, many of the formal properties of the built body carry connotations of whiteness: it is ideal, hard, achieved, wealthy, hairless and tanned' (pp. 148–150). This seems to me to be a very eclectic reading of such a body which overlooks the problems that it poses in terms of other equally important values attached to whiteness. The body achieved through body building is first and foremost a body devoid of any practical use (unlike the body of the weightlifter, the discus thrower, or the sprinter) and devoted exclusively to the vanity of the spectacle. oiled, shiny bodies, showing off muscle in contorted, pseudo-Classical poses. This is in

blatant opposition to a whiteness which emphasizes spiritualism, purposefulness and the negation of the materiality of the body The contradictions of the built body make it extremely difficult to promote as an unproblematic embodiment of white masculinity. This is quite evident in the case of Arnold Schwarzenegger who had to fight off the connotations of primitivism (very uncomfortable in clothes), superficiality and lack of intelligence that his physicality seemed to exhume. This kind of body seems to belong to a man that lacks the depth of a typical male film hero and can hardly be taken seriously: a number of films in his career have used him as the object of a visual or narrative practical joke (for example *The Long Goodbye, Hercules Goes Bananas, Twins, Junior, Terminator, Total Recall*) Furthermore, and especially in the context of the colonial encounter, the muscular white body seems to dangerously emphasize the brutal force involved in the subjugation of the indigenous peoples and the maintenance of colonial power, rather than the civilizing influence of the white spirit.

Finally, some of the practical and political questions that the author raises in the opening chapter of the book ('The matter of whiteness') need to be addressed. Dyer identifies a methodological shift in his book compared to his 1988 article 'White' (*Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4) as a move away from examining white–black interactions, which is justified because: 'to focus exclusively on those texts that are "about" racial difference and interaction risks giving the impression that whiteness is only white, or only matters, when it is explicitly set against non-white, whereas whiteness reproduces itself as whiteness in all texts all of the time' (p 13) As a result of this shift the book concentrates on 'white' texts, which consequently raises problems of discovering the unifying characteristics of whiteness, given that 'white people in their whiteness are imaged as individual and/or endlessly diverse, complex and changing' (p. 12). I feel that these tensions are extremely productive when one teaches race through whiteness: the oppressive, all-encompassing character of the category 'race' is easily understood and, most importantly, felt with reference to one's immediate personal experience. This bypasses some of the other problems that Dyer is worried about (the 'green light problem', 'me-too-ism' and guilt): anger is the reaction of white students in this context. Furthermore, the study of whiteness invites work (to discover whiteness even when one is convinced that there is no unity in such a term) which combines the most challenging analytical skills and political sensitivities that characterize our discipline: to work against the accepted wisdom, to question your position, to identify textual patterns and meanings It also realizes the simple, but politically important project of *White* 'to make whiteness strange'.

review:

Deirdre Boyle *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited.*
New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 286 pp.

HEATHER OSBORNE

Written as a 'cautionary tale' rather than a 'chronicle of failure',
Deirdre Boyle's *Subject to Change* attempts to chart the trajectories
of three 1970s guerrilla television groups in order to offer hope to
future generations still intent on democratizing the media Boyle,
who has long been a critic and historian of alternative video and has
written numerous books and articles on the subject, began this study
in 1983 'as an attempt to understand not only what had happened to
guerrilla television of the 1970s but what had happened to the
"Now" generation, my generation' (p. vi) It differs from her other
works less in subject matter than in terms of personal investment; as
a scholar and a teacher whose own work was heavily influenced by
the utopian nature of the discourses surrounding video in the 1970s,
Boyle gives priority to determining the precise moments of 'disaster'
for guerrilla television (presumably to make sure they never happen
again) Speaking as an insider allows her the depth of knowledge to
consider why, in the face of so much potential, the alternative
media's hope for creating lasting social change never came to
fruition in quite the way they had imagined it would.
    While Boyle acknowledges in the introduction that the book is not
an exhaustive examination of the entire alternative video movement,
the groups she chooses to focus on (the Top Value Television, more
famously known as TVTV, collective; Kentucky- and Tennessee-
based Broadside TV, and the University of Minnesota's University
Community Video project) are intended to provide diverse examples

of the pitfalls associated with working within established and fledgling broadcast systems such as The Big Three networks, the Public Broadcasting System and cable television. Although TVTV (and its critiques of mainstream media coverage of political conventions, the Washington social scene and the Oscars) has arguably been the most visible in previous histories of alternative media groups, Broadside and UCV each have a unique story to tell as well, the former growing out of a project that attempted to use video in the creation of a 'living [community] newsletter' in rural Appalachia, and the latter attempted to forge televisual alliances between a university and its larger community of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Boyle argues that contrary to the separatism from the Establishment espoused by the counterculture of the 1960s, TVTV, Broadside TV and UCV's early emphasis on developing an alternative to mainstream television evolved into the notion that television could instead be 'reformed by example' – their example Keeping in mind the differences between each group's purposes, Boyle's book tracks their developing aesthetic and organizational strategies in order to demonstrate their increasing capacity for co-optation by network structures, funding sources and FCC policy.

The book is loosely structured and combines published reviews, analysis of the television programs created by each group and interviews with some of the movement's key figures, such as Michael Shamberg of TVTV, Ted Carpenter of Broadside and Stephen Kulczycki of UCV Weaving tales of guerrilla video's origins with the specific histories of the groups, Boyle casts each one's development as three very different responses to the alternative video movement's imperative of creating more effective and socially relevant television. She discusses Shamberg's role in creating the movement's 'bible' – *Guerrilla Television* – and his concern with challenging established media, Carpenter's belief in empowering a rural Appalachian population to use video to speak about their heritage, and Kulczycki's push to establish connections between university students and the larger community. According to Boyle, the priorities of each group were all part of the optimism surrounding video at the time, but she also tries to illustrate how such ideals eventually became unrealizable as they clashed with established broadcast structures. Speaking as someone who shared the belief that video could democratize the media, Boyle provides not only a historical and critical context for each moment in the groups' evolution, and an overview of the changes in video technology and technique, but also a sense of the personalities involved In doing so, she attempts to convey both the elation and the disappointment of each group as their work 'flourished' with the growing interest in video, and later 'foundered' in the face of funding crises, critical failures and political restructuring. The section of photographs and mementoes in the middle of the book and Boyle's own description of

TVTV's twenty-year reunion party in 1992 are two particularly potent examples of the tempering of the once-boundless optimism of the groups.

As a complement to the more colourful story of the movement's rise and fall, the epilogue illustrates the bigger institutional picture by sketching a historical overview of the structures within which all three groups were attempting to work PBS, network and cable television. According to Boyle, by taking advantage of both the networks' new-found enthusiasm for the grittier video style, and the belief that cable television and PBS would provide venues for voices hitherto unheard, the groups thought they could make a meaningful intervention on behalf of media reform and/or social change. None of them could foresee the future in which the fickleness of the networks, the continually threatened status of public television and growing cable conglomerates' continual attempts to evade their responsibility to the 'public interest' would leave alternative media so sorely without any alternatives. Boyle's thoughtful discussion of the ensuing mess (culminating in the Reagan era and Congress's outright hostility towards the NEA), its relevance to today's 'television guerrillas', and the final section of the book, which contains an appendix of archival information and videographies, give even more value to *Subject to Change*'s project.

In all, the book demonstrates well the importance of the guerrilla television movement's history at this moment. Boyle's project is to consider where the failures and successes have occurred *before* in order to understand how to develop viable forms of alternative media *now* Additionally, although the book is primarily a tale of unrealized goals, Boyle does make a plug for some of the more successful ventures in alternative media (Paper Tiger Television and Deep Dish TV) and praises the hard work of communities working to keep public access a protected legal right. The book is certainly inflected by her own biases and belief in the potential for change through media, but given the political climate in which we are living, the impulse is an understandable one